A STUDY OF THE THEME OF JUSTICE IN THE THEOLOGY OF REINHOLD NIEBUHR IN CRITICAL COMPARISON WITH THE THEOLOGY OF SELECT LATIN AMERICAN LIBERATION THEOLOGIANS

by

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I declare that the following dissertation is original work and is the result of research carried out at New College, University of Edinburgh from October 1986 to September 1989.

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For Claude Marie Barbour, a labourer in the field of
'intimate' community and conscientization.
For Tilly Black Bear and her people, who taught me
to be humble in the face of cultural difference.
For a women in Piedras Negras, Mexico, who confronted me
with 'Christ in the poor'.
For Osmundo and Anna Ligia, who took the risk of assuming
we would grant them 'common grace', and who gave
us their hearts.
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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Some years ago I had the opportunity to hear a church historian speak about the death of Archbishop Oscar Romero in El Salvador. He had just returned from the funeral service of Oscar Romero and shared with us his perception of the church in Latin America. His description has remained in my memory these many years. He stated that the church in Latin America was experiencing a history which corresponds to that of the early church. It is a church being built upon the blood of martyrs. More recently I made friends with a man and woman from Central America. They shared with me their experience of violence in Guatemala. They had lost a child in military raids on their village and had watched a cousin publicly executed in the village square as an example to others. This couple is now going to South America to teach christian education in another country characterized by violence.

It is this commitment and discipleship which is foundational for Liberation theology. And it is to be recognized that Liberation theology diminishes some of the profundity of this experience when it is reduced to descriptive narrative or logical argument. It is difficult to communicate successfully the experience of poverty and violence which characterizes Latin America. The masses of the dead and disappeared too easily lose their humanity in the recitation of numbers. And the commitment and self-giving which occurs in this context can not be captured on the written page or in the imagination of the reader.

It is for this reason that a qualifying statement is required before entering into the critique of Liberation theology. This study is pursued in humility before the profound realities of Latin America. This study is not to trivialize the poverty and violence of Latin America. Neither is it to denigrate the sacrificial self-giving common to discipleship in Latin America.

What this study is intended to achieve is the critical assessment of the theology which seeks to give meaning to this experience of discipleship. It is this theology which has emerged from the Latin American context which is to be placed in critical dialogue with the theology of Reinhold Niebuhr. Both Liberation Theology and Niebuhrian theology are concerning with social justice and its relation to Christian faith. It is the thesis of this study that Niebuhrian realism provides a theology which is better able to guide and give meaning to discipleship which seeks social justice. At the same time this study will examine the areas of Niebuhrian theology which are challenged by the insights and criticisms of Liberation theology. The end result of this study will be the explication of a Niebuhrian realism which is 'liberative'.

Our examination of the theme of justice will begin with an analysis and critique of Reinhold Niebuhr's understanding of justice. This first section of our study will comprise four chapters which deal with Niebuhr's anthropological realism, the values of justice, the implementation of justice, and a final chapter of critique and comment. At this point I need to take responsibility for my reading of Niebuhr. I am conscious that I have organized and abstracted Niebuhr's position in a systematic manner which is lacking in his own works. In this manner I have reduced the dialectic tension and ambiguity experienced in the reading of Niebuhr. Whether this is a loss or gain to Niebuhrian theology I will leave to the reader to assess. A second comment to be made concerning this analysis of Niebuhr's theology has to do with the term 'Christian Realism'. In the following study I have avoided the use of this term. This term has come to refer to Niebuhr's theology and the theological movement related to it. It is my concern in this study to deal specifically with Niebuhr's position and not the post-Niebuhrian theological movement.

The next section of our study will involve placing Niebuhrian theology in dialogue with Liberation theology. This dialogue will begin with a comparison of theological method. Following this chapter on theological method will be three chapters which deal with specific theological topics and their relationship to social justice. These

topics are; sin, salvation, and christology. The final chapter in this section will deal with the values and ethics of Liberation theology.

It is necessary at this point to define what is meant by 'Liberation theologian' and how these theologians are chosen to be in dialogue with Niebuhrian theology. Our study will be limited to dialogue with Liberation theologians of Latin America. This identification has do with context and commitment rather than geographical location or cultural identity. These theologians write with the socio-political and economic context of Latin American in mind and with a commitment to social transformation which favours the poor and oppressed of Latin America. The choice of specific Latin American Liberation theologians will correspond to the topic under consideration. Different Liberation theologians will be brought into dialogue with Niebuhrian theology according to the subject matter which their work addresses. This means that our choice of Liberation theologians will be selective, but still representative.

Another issue to be addressed concerning Liberation theologians is their differing theological traditions. In this study I have avoided the identification of Liberation theologians as either Roman Catholic or Protestant. It is not that this distinction is insignificant. It is no accident that Protestant Liberation theology presents some of the most significant challenges to the Niebuhrian position. This distinction between theological traditions is avoided because of the commonly-held ideas among the various theologians. It is very difficult to make general statements concerning Liberation theologians which identifies them as either Roman Catholic or Protestant. The consideration of each specific theologian requires so much qualification concerning his or her relation to a tradition, that such identification seems counterproductive to the task at hand.

The final section of our study will be an attempt to present a Niebuhrian theology modified by the critical insights of Liberation theology. In this section we will consider a theology of justice which is inclusive of the realism of Niebuhrian theology and also inclusive of the historical commitment of Liberation theology. We will identify this modified Niebuhrian theology as Liberative realism.

A concluding introductory comment needs to be made concerning the limitations of this study. There are areas of justice and of contemporary concern which are not addressed in this study, such as issues of penal justice or ecological concerns. Both Liberation theology and Niebuhrian theology are primarily concerned with distributive justice in regard to social life. They are concerned with the structures and systems of justice and how they determine social existence. A contemporary issue which neither Liberation theology or Niebuhrian theology address is that of ecology. This is certainly a growing issue in national and international justice concerning pollution and the global affect of the decimation of the rain forests, but it lies beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Another limit of this study is in regard to the ideological plurality of social existence. This dissertation is concerned with presenting a Christian theology of justice and does not deal with the religious and secular diversity of which social life is composed. In this regard, further study would be required which explores how a Christian position on justice relates to a society in which there is a variety of religious and secular positions in regard to social justice.

PART ONE: THE NIEBUHRIAN THEOLOGY OF JUSTICE

1. ANTHROPOLOGICAL REALISM

From the perspective of Niebuhrian realism, the development of a theology of justice will begin with an examination of the possibilities and limitations of human agency. For this reason we begin this study with a detailed description of Niebuhr's anthropological realism. It is this anthropological realism which is the initial critical concern in relation to the construction of social justice. Niebuhr's theological and political critique is centred in his concern for a theory of human existence which is inclusive of the full height and depth of human nature. His criticism of contemporary theological and philosophical thinkers is that they have excluded, ignored or neglected particular aspects of human life. Either they have neglected the natural organic aspects of human nature in favour of the rational, or they have neglected the rational and religious aspects in favour of concerns over organic and social aspects of human nature. For Niebuhr, 'realism' means a full consideration of human nature in its totality. Thus, for Niebuhr, any philosophy or theology desiring to explicate an aspect of human existence must be in dialogue with this complete anthropology.

Niebuhr's anthropological concerns can be listed under four categories; organic, transcendent, religious and social human being. Although these categorical abstractions are helpful for analysis, it is to be remembered that these categories describe the unity of human nature. There is no organic human nature without social, transcendent, or religious human nature. All four aspects of human life interpenetrate one another in a unity of being. According to Niebuhr, the weakness of philosophies and theologies which have not embraced realism is found in this very point. To exclude, ignore or neglect one of these categories in reflective thought is to leave one's self unaware of either the limitations or the potentials of human life.

Organic human being

Our initial concern is with the human being as organism in relation to nature and other human organisms. The ordering of our examination of categories does not reflect a valuing of 'less' to 'more' or 'evil' to 'good'. Niebuhr expressly rejected the greek tradition of exclusive 'spirit-flesh' dualism in which the organic body was 'evil' and transcendent spirit or soul 'good'.[1] Rather, it is my intention that the ordering of categories reflect natural degrees of differentiation of consciousness and order in human life. Within this intention, it seems reasonable to begin with the biological reality out of which human life has evolved and which continues to serve as foundation and base to human existence.

The universe in which the human being has evolved appears as an environment of conflict. This conflict is the temporal flux wherein unity and chaos, harmony and anarchy, seem in constant dialectical opposition. Organically related to this dynamic universe is the human being. This world of nature exists both as environment and as 'essence' of the human. The human being discovers itself to be a finite organism existing in a passing flux, a prisoner of partial perspectives and also to be subject to inner biological impulse.

> The obvious fact is that man is a child of nature, subject to its vicissitudes, compelled by its necessities, driven by its impulses, and confined within the brevity of the years which nature permits its varied organic form, allowing them some, but not too much, latitude.[2]

In this world the human finds his or her personality determined by specific forces of nature. The human being receives the determinative fate of sex, race, geographical location and physical individuality. In this regard physical existence is found to be characterized by contingent and arbitrary realities.

The human being is also organically related to a living world. In this relationship the human is involved in the "inchoate harmonies in nature's anarchies".[3] The anarchy of this living world is the anarchy of the 'forest'. In this ecology the species of life live by the death

of other forms of life. The harmony of this 'forest' is that each species survives. Within this context the human being has evolved the various impulses by which it survives and expands itself in the world. It it these impulses which form a dynamic organic base for human life and which influence transcendent, religious and social life.

Niebuhr identifies two basic natural impulses which compel human life. The first of these is the impulse of self-regard and the second is the impulse of self-giving. The impulse of self-regard is the biological will-to-live and is the natural egoistic drive of all organisms for survival.

> Human beings are endowed by nature with both selfish and unselfish impulses. The individual is a nucleus of energy which is organically related from the very beginning with other energy, but which maintains, nevertheless, its own discreet existence. Every type of energy in nature seeks to preserve and perpetuate itself and to gain fulfilment within terms of its unique genius. The energy of human life does not differ in this from the whole world of nature.[4]

It is this egoism at the heart of human life which compels the conflict of life with life. This is a focus of Niebuhr's realism. At all levels of human existence we find this egoistic self-regard. Even the more nobler pursuits of human beings are unable to eliminate the influence of self-interest.

In dialectical opposition to the impulse of self-regard is the impulse of self-giving. This impulse is also a natural impulse and is expressed in community and family rather than in the conflict of life with life. Self-giving has its initial expression in the family. Like many other species of life, humanity lives in groups. But humanity differs greatly from all other forms of life in terms of the family. The family is unique to human beings. This uniqueness is caused by the long maturation and dependency of children on parents and the fact that human beings mature in life-skills by means of education rather than instinct. This results in an intimate group where members are organically related and dependent on one another. Within this 'family' self-giving becomes a possibility. This is due to what Niebuhr calls 'common grace'. Common grace is the experience of security which the individual feels in the family environment. This security is the gift

of the intimate group to the individual and is thus 'grace'. It is this security which mitigates the impulse of self-regard and allows the individual to risk self-giving. Within the family the individual can express the natural impulses of self-giving. Some of these impulses are paternal, maternal and filial affection, gregariousness and sympathy.

The family is the foundation for all larger social groups. These larger communities also are to be understood as composed of organic relationships. The community or society is organic in so far as it is integrated by loyalties, forms of cohesion and hierarchies of authority, kinship feeling, geographic contiguity, common memories and common fears. Through these elements the family is extended and consolidated.

This organic quality of families and communities does not ensure that the impulse of self-giving will dominate the impulse of self-regard. Self-regard finds expression both within and between families and communities. Families and communities can be separated by organic elements of nature as well as united by them. They can be separated by geography, climate and accidents of history. In this separated state they easily express self-regard and enter into the conflict of life with life.

Nature which creates the possibilities of organic union and self-giving is also the source for self-regard within families and social groups. It is nature which first provides human beings with the fact of inequality.

> Nature does not endow men equally; and the impulses of nature create societies in which inequalities of endowment are accentuated because the shrewd and the strong are able to arrogate powers and privileges which enhance their strength and place the week, the simple and unfortunate under additional disadvantages.[5]

It is enough at this point to indicate the organic base of self-regard found between and within communities. This impulse will be further examined in relation to communities under the categories of transcendent and social human being.

A final aspect to be noted under the category of organic human being is what Niebuhr calls 'primary religion' or meaningfulness in

human life. This is a factor of organic human being because it deals not so much with rationality as with a basic trust.

> Men may be quite unable to define the meaning of life, and yet live by a simple trust that it has meaning. This primary religion is the basic optimism of all vital and wholesome human life.[6]

In conclusion it is important to highlight the initial focus of realism found in our examination of organic human life. This element of realism is identified as the dialectic between self-regard and self-giving which exists in individual and social human life. This dialectic is founded in biological impulses and modified by the securities and insecurities of life. In the security of kith and kin one is supported and encouraged in the various expressions of self-giving. In dialectical unity and interpenetration with this impulse of self-giving is the impulse of self-regard. This impulse is supported and encouraged by the character of life itself. "Man's insecurity lies first of all in the determinate and finite character of human existence amidst the immensities of the physical world and the caprices of nature".[7] In this insecurity the will-to-live drives the human to enter into the conflict of life with life in order to survive. This dialectic of biological impulse is foundational in human being. It may be transmuted or sublimated into other behavioural expressions, but is is never absent. This dialectic will continue to be a major theme of realism as we examine the other categories of human life.

The second focus of anthropological realism begins in this section but finds its dialectical opposite in the next. This is the dialectic between finite and transcendent human being.

Transcendent human being

The human being is an organism subject to the determinisms of nature, and yet, it is also a creature with cognitive awareness which allows it to transcend its determined nature and apprehend itself, its world and the indetermined possibilities of human life. In self-transcendence, the human being explores indeterminate degrees of

freedom in relation to organic and social life. In this radical freedom the self realizes its unique individuality.

> Human consciousness not only transcends natural process but it transcends itself. It thereby gains the possibility for those endless variations and elaborations of human capacities which characterize human existence. Every impulse of nature in man can be modified, extended, repressed and combined with other impulses in countless variations. In consequence no human individual is like another, no matter how similar their heredity and environment.[8]

It is this self-transcending capacity of human existence which Niebuhr identifies as 'spirit'. The human individual is a spiritual creature insofar as he or she participates in a realm of reality which transcends the realm of nature.[9] This realm of 'spirit' has its beginning in the creative possibilities which self-transcendence makes available. Because the human being transcends self, others and nature, it has the potential to be a creative agent in life. Human creativity can manipulate the forms of nature and create new unities and vitalities.

Here we encounter Niebuhr's second focus of realism. The human being is both creature and creator, and determined and indetermined. This is the dialectic between nature and spirit or organic and transcendent human life. As with the earlier dialectic, this nature-spirit or finite-transcendent relationship is a unity in which there is mutual modification. In the human being there is no expression of nature which is not repressed or expanded by spirit; and there is no expression of spirit which is not limited or influenced by nature. Thus the human being always lives with this self-contradiction: he or she is transcendent yet finite, and all expressions of human freedom reveal a conflict of limitation and possibility.

The initial expression of this realm of 'spirit' is that of reason and imagination. Through reason and imagination the human can create or destroy, limit or expand, the objects of its freedom. This rational and imaginative aspect of spirit is to be differentiated from the more ultimate form of transcendence in which the human encounters ultimate realities. This form of spiritual vitality will be examined under the category of religious human being.

Through the creativity of reason and imagination the human being can be described as moral and historical. Transcendent freedom makes possible the construction of moral ideals and ethical systems, and historical consciousness. Because the human being transcends the self, with its relations and behaviours, it can become a manipulator of these realities. Because the human being can also transcend and apprehend time, it can create meaning out of temporal flux. But as with all human endeavour, reason and imagination are subject to the dialectical conflicts of self-regard and self-giving, and finitude and transcendence.

The freedom of human self-transcendence makes morality not only a possibility, but a necessity. "The human capacity for self-transcendence, the ability to see beyond our immediate world to more and more inclusive loyalties and values, is the basis of all that is good and all that is evil in human life".[10] Through the use of reason and imagination the human being can be the creative source of constructive as well as destructive vitality.

Through reason a 'sense of justice' is possible in human relations. Compelled by a desire for social consistency, reason can become the means of establishing justice. Reason accomplishes this task by restricting the natural impulse of egoism and subjecting the expansive will of human life to an arbitration between conflicting rights wherein interest is related to interest and will to will in increasing degrees of social harmony. Niebuhr assesses the presence of this rationality according to four categories. The first category to be assessed is the vividness with which we appreciate the needs of others. The more we understand the needs of other humans the greater is said to be our rationality. The second category concerns the extent to which we become conscious of the real character of our own motives and impulses. This is an assessment of realism. The third category is our ability to harmonize conflicting impulses in our life and in society. And the fourth category which expresses our rationality is the capacity to choose adequate means for approved ends.[11]

In this moral task, reason does not function free of limitation or obstacle. Reason is utilised within the context of the dialectics of realism. Concerning the dialectic of finitude and transcendence,

reason is limited at two points. On the one hand reason can never be pure in terms of transcendent consciousness. Reason will always be subject to organic and social impulses, prejudices and passion. There can never be a disinterested rational faculty which assesses moral means and ends according to some uncompromised objective vantage point. Moral rational endeavour will always find itself in a context of limited knowledge and parochial concerns. On the other hand reason is limited from the vantage point of ultimate transcendence. The self not only transcends nature but it also transcends reason. From this perspective there are moral concerns which are comprehensible only from the position of religious human being. This transcendent aspect of morality moves beyond the realm in which analytic or calculating reason has its place.

In the same manner, reason is subject to the dialectic of self-regard and self-giving. Through reason, the impulse of self-giving can expand the organic impulses of family and community and create larger social harmonies. But in the same way, reason can also be used to serve self-regard. Motivated by self-regard, reason becomes the means for rationalizing greater benefits for the self. By means of reason the self universalises itself, making itself the end for moral action. This leads to an important change in moral relationships and human potential for destruction.

> ...in man reason bursts the bonds and limits which nature sets upon her own impulses. Man's higher degree of self-consciousness and egocentricity transmute the brute's will-to-live into the human will-to-power.'[12]

With the acquisition of power, the human can ensure a limited security at the expense of other life. At this point, reason as ethical expression is limited by the power-seeking of self-regard. It is this will-to-power which necessitates the development of political systems wherein political power is used to limit the egoistic expansiveness of self-regard.

In like manner, imagination is expressed in this dialectical realism. Imagination is a means for moral expression according to its ability to imagine more just forms of community, empathize with the

needs of others and create symbols and emotionally potent over-simplifications which inspire ethical action. In this function, imagination contributes to moral rationality. But imagination also is subject to the limitations and possibilities of finitude and transcendence, and self-regard and self-giving. Imagination is limited to the same factors as reason with the exception that imagination further modifies the self-regard of human beings concerning their will-to-power. According to Niebuhr, it is imagination which promotes the inevitable human desire for power.

> The beast of prey ceases from its conquests when its maw is crammed; but man's lusts are fed by his imagination, and he will not be satisfied until the universal objectives which the imagination envisages are attained. His protest against finiteness makes the universal character of his imperial dreams inevitable. In his sanest moments he sees his life fulfilled as an organic part of a harmonious whole. But he has few sane moments; for he is governed more by imagination than by reason and imagination is compounded of mind and impulse.[13]

With this consideration of reason and imagination as moral instruments we perceive a primary focus of Niebuhr's realism. Reason and imagination are in themselves nuetral insofar as values of morality and ethics are concerned. Yet they can be used to modify the organic impulses of humanity far beyond the limits set by nature. In this regard they become the means to create greater harmony and unity or greater chaos and anarchy. It is the insight of Niebuhr's realism that human beings inevitably orient themselves to self-regard and the will-to-power in moral and ethical endeavour. While this is not an ethical posture which is determined, thus violating human freedom, it is the "...inevitable tendency of human beings to be more interested in their own needs than in those of others and to prefer their advantage to that of others,...".[14]

The second major expression of human transcendent consciousness is history.

> Man's freedom to transcend the natural flux gives him the possibility of grasping a span of time in his consciousness and thereby of knowing history. It also enables him to change, reorder and transmute the causal sequences of nature and thereby to *make* history.[15]

In this regard the human being is both a creature and creator of history. Niebuhr understands that it is only in relation to history that we can fully understand the human being.

> The fact is that the human self can only be understood in a dramatic-historical environment. Any effort to co-ordinate man to some coherence, whether of nature or of reason, will falsify the facts; because the self's freedom, including both its creative and destructive capacities, preclude such co-ordination.'[6]

For Niebuhr, only a dramatic-historical description of human existence will embody the full depth and height of human nature. In history we see both the good and evil of human endeavour and obtain a realistic anthropology. In this manner we know ourselves as creatures of time and history. But in this same manner we also know ourselves as free transcendent creatures who are creators of history. In this capacity human beings are able to reconstruct the vitalities of nature and human society and make history.

As with previous considerations of transcendence, the self in relation to history is conditioned by the dialectics of realism. In terms of the finitude-transcendent dialectic, the human being stands in a conflicting relationship with time. In one sense time is the stage of history. Because the human consciousness transcends time it can create forms and institutions which are not governed by natural necessity nor limited to the life spans of nature. Therefore time is the stage on which human history can be created. But in another sense, time is part of the very substance of history. In this regard human consciousness is subject to the natural flux and historical achievements and institutions are subject to decay and mortality. In this way time reveals the partial and limited nature of human life and endeavour.

It is in the context of this dialectic of finitude-transcendence that Niebuhr asserts the ambiguity and relative historical existence of human beings.

> In so far as the human mind in both its structure and in its capacities of observation has a vantage point over the flux of historical events, it is possible to achieve valid historical

> knowledge, though this knowledge will never have the exactness of knowledge in the field of natural science. But insofar as men, individually or collectively, are involved in the temporal flux they must view the stream of events from some particular locus. A high degree of imagination, insight, or detachment may heighten or enlarge the locus; but no human power can make it fully adequate. This fact is one of the most vivid examples of the ambiguity of the human situation.'[17]

In the context of this ambiguity and relativeness the dialectic of self-regard and self-giving find expression. Motivated by self-giving, the human individual or society can seek the imagination and intelligence to extend their historical parameters to include as much of other life as possible. This self-giving can also motivate individuals and societies to be realistic and self-critical concerning the destructive impulses at work in their interpretation and construction of history. Self-regard works in opposition to such attempts. Self-regard seeks to universalize the individual or society and make particular history a universal history. Through self-regard the history of a society becomes the orienting norm for all societies.

It is in transcendent human being that the concerns of realism become most acute. The problem with human beings, according to Niebuhr, is not their organic impulses or finite and partial existence. It is rather the transcendent consciousness which refuses to recognize the limits imposed by nature. The problem with humanity is that they claim a degree of freedom which they do not have. They claim a universality or disinterestedness which they can not obtain. It is the inevitable frustration of the human being that 'his reach is beyond his grasp'.

> It is man's ineluctable fate to work on tasks which he cannot complete in his brief span of years, to accept responsibilities the true ends of which he cannot fulfil, and to build communities which cannot realize the perfection of his visions.'[18]

The destructive side of this 'realism' is that human beings utilize reason and imagination to further their will-to-power. And in their search for security they claim certainty for their knowledge and universalize their history and interpretation of life. It is thus in

the free transcendent consciousness that injustice and sin become a possibility.

Religious human being

The religious aspect of human existence stands in continuity with its rational and imaginative elements. It is when we combine the two categories of transcendent and religious human being that we have a complete spiritual anthropology. Under this dimension of human transcendence, Niebuhr introduces a new dialectic. This is the dialectic between the human who yearns for the ideal, absolute and unconditioned, and the human who is confronted by the absolute as divine person.

Niebuhr understands human beings to be incurably religious. This inclination toward religious consciousness finds its source in transcendent human freedom. In this freedom, the self apprehends a unity beyond itself.

> The human spirit is set in this dimension of depth in such a way that it is able to apprehend, but not to comprehend, the total dimension. The human mind is forced to relate all finite events to causes and consummations beyond themselves. It thus constantly conceives all particular things in their relation to the totality of reality, and can adequately apprehend totality only in terms of a principle of unity.'[19]

It is in this awareness of the totality of existence that the human seeks to expand 'primary religion' into more and more coherent understandings of the meaning of the universe. In regard to the cosmic totality in which the human exists, the transcendent self finds that the world and the self are insufficient as sources of this meaning. Therefore the self looks beyond itself and its world to more coherent unities. In this sense the human spirit is homeless in this world and yearns for a more absolute orientation in meaning.

In this yearning after the absolute, the human being is frustrated by the dialectic of finitude-transcendence.

> ...man is, even in the highest reaches of his transcendent freedom, too finite to comprehend the eternal by his own resources. But it is also understood that man is, even in the

deepest involvement of process and nature, too free of nature to be blind to the possibilities of a disclosure of the Eternal which transcends hims.[20]

For this reason we find the human in a dialectic in which it is possible to apprehend a unity or absolute coherence, yet be unable to understand and know it. For Niebuhr, this dialectic is transformed by the encounter with God. It is only through the self-revelation of a transcendent God that this unity and coherence becomes explicit. This is not to say that Niebuhr understands that human beings are totally incapable of awareness of God. Niebuhr perceives God to be both transcendent and immanent in relation to human life. "God is at once the pinnacle and the basis of reality, the goal toward which life is striving and the force by which it strives".[21] This transcendence means that comprehension is only possible by revelation. And yet God is not totally 'other' in a Barthian sense. God can be apprehended at the horizon of human yearning. Niebuhr identifies this apprehension of God as 'general revelation'; "...the testimony in the consciousness of every person that his life touches a reality beyond himself, a reality deeper and higher than the system of nature in which he stands".[22]

Niebuhr understands that this experience of general revelation is composed of three elements. The first of these elements is the sense of reverence for a majesty and of dependence upon an ultimate source of being. This element of majesty and dependence corresponds to the human apprehension of a seemingly infinite cosmos in which he or she exits as a partial and finite being. The second element of general revelation is a sense of moral obligation and of moral unworthiness before a judge. This element corresponds to the moral nature in humanity which experiences the guilt of a 'reach beyond its grasp' and a dialectic of self-regard and self-giving which frustrates pure moral action. From this posture the human experiences itself as a failure in terms of cosmic process. The third element of general revelation is a longing for forgiveness. This longing corresponds to the yearning for the unity and coherence which the human apprehends beyond its particularity and finiteness.[23]

It is in this regard that Niebuhr rejects the theological concept of 'total depravity'. For Niebuhr, the human being maintains a degree

of 'original righteousness'. He interprets the myth of the 'fall' of humanity in the third chapter of Genesis as a description of human existence rather than a literal historical statement. The presence of 'original righteousness' in humanity is an existential statement concerning the ability of the transcendent self to apprehend that which exists beyond its own history and nature. Of course, as discussed above, this transcendent self is never free of its limited, particular, and finite locus in history and nature.

As with all human endeavour, the yearning for the absolute is also subject to the conflict of the dialectics of realism. In terms of the finitude-transcendence dialectic it is easy for human beings to transmute this yearning for the absolute into a devotion to relative values. This is supported by the self-regard and self-giving dialectic when the self universalizes its own values and places them in the context of 'general revelation'. In this way religious endeavour can serve either self-regard or self-giving. In terms of self-giving, the human being apprehends its own limits and gives itself over to that unity and coherence which stands beyond it. In terms of self-regard, the human asserts itself by giving its particular and finite values the pretension of universality and absoluteness.

In this context of relative ambiguity and unclear motivation, the human being seeks the ultimate coherence in life. It is only in this quest that the human can hope to know itself and the meaning of its existence. "The individual never comes to full self-consciousness, and therefore to a consciousness of what is nature and what is spirit in him, until he strains after the absolute and the unconditioned".[24] It is in this yearning for the absolute, that the human being is confronted by God.

Niebuhr understands that the revelation of God, must of necessity, be in history. This is due to the historical nature of human consciousness.

> Each individual transcends and is involved in the historical process. In so far as he is involved in history, the disclosure of life's meaning must come to him in history. In so far as he transcends history the source of life's meaning must transcend history.[25]

This self-revelation by God is termed 'special revelation' by Niebuhr. This special revelation is "...apprehended in the context of a particular history of salvation in which specific historical events become special revelations of the character of God and of His purposes".[26] Corresponding to the three elements of general revelation, special revelation reveals God as Creator, Judge, and Redeemer. In this revelation there are two immediate consequences. First is the contradiction of human culture. God's transcendence stands over against all human constructions and vitalities. In this event God is experienced as 'other' and judge. The second consequence is the revealing of ultimate coherence. This revelation of meaning completes the incompleteness, clarifies obscurities, and corrects falsifications. This aspect of revelation is the basis for wisdom; a total explanation of life.

According to Niebuhr, this historical and trans-historical revelation finds its culmination in the revelation in Christ. In Christ, the human-divine encounter becomes explicit. This revelation and encounter takes place in history where the full height and depth of human existence can respond and embrace the divine.

> We must make it clear that the concepts of both personality and history are ontologically ambiguous. Personality, whether God's or man's, is defined only in dramatic and historic encounter. ...the truth in Christ cannot be speculatively established. It is established only as men encounter God, individually and collectively, after the pattern set by Christ's mediation. ...the encounter between God and man, as the encounters between men in history, must be by faith and love and not by the discovery of some common essence of reason or nature underlying individuals and particulars.[27]

It is in this encounter that the individual becomes aware of the full stature of his or her freedom and also of the degree to which that freedom is subject to the distortion of evil. In the encounter with Christ we are confronted with the revelation of what we are suppose to be and what we have become. In Christ we are confronted with the 'new Adam'; the human characterized by self-giving love. According to Niebuhr, this is the revelation of the essential nature of human being.

The initial revelation in this human-divine encounter is the awareness in the human being of personal sin. This sin is characterized by a search for security which has led to the misappropriation of power and the egoism of pride. Our misuse of power leads to injustice and our pride causes us to forget we are creatures of nature.

> Ideally men seek to subject their arbitrary and contingent existence under the dominion of absolute reality. But practically they always mix the finite with the eternal and claim for themselves, their nation, their culture, or their class the centre of existence. ...man is destined, both by the imperfections of his knowledge and by his desire to overcome his finiteness to make absolute claims for his partial and finite values. He tries, in short, to make himself God.[28]

Niebuhr uses the theological concept of 'original sin' to describe this inevitable aspect of sin in human life. This theological symbol is not to be understood in historic terms, but rather as descriptive of human existence. 'Original sin' refers to the inevitability of sin inherent in human freedom. For Niebuhr, human freedom is the source of sin which makes it both possible and inevitable. Sin is a problem, not of the organic or 'carnal' self, but of the spiritual transcendence of human life. "Man...is a sinner not because he is one limited individual within a whole but rather because he is betrayed by his very ability to survey the whole to imagine himself the whole".[29]

While the first moment of revelation is one of judgement and the awareness of sin, the second moment is one of divine mercy and grace. In the revelation in Christ we encounter, not only the normative human, but also the character of God. In this divine encounter we find a divine self-giving love which will free us from the guilt of sin.

> The Christian answer to the human predicament, a divine mercy toward man, revealed in Christ, which is at once a power enabling the self to realize itself truly beyond itself in love, and the forgiveness of God toward the self which even at its best remains in partial contradiction to the divine will, is an answer which grows out of, and which in turn helps to create, the radical Christian concept of human freedom.[30]

It is in this context of forgiveness and freedom that the human being realizes the life of faith. In this life of faith the human being subjects his or her will to an absolute and universal will. At the same time this faith looks to the ultimate order beyond the incoherences, incongruities and cross-purposes of life. In this way the life of faith finds its orientation in a divine will and coherence which is revealed as self-giving love in Christ. Thus, the life of faith is one in which the human being both loses the self in subjection to love and finds the self in freedom under divine forgiveness. In faith, the human knows that its efforts to love will be supported by the love of God, and that its inevitable failures to love will always stand under the forgiveness of God. In this way the individual is free to attain the highest self-realization in relation to the absolute.

But this life of faith is never free of the dialectics of realism. For this reason forgiveness is necessary for freedom. This freedom is never absolute, but always subject to the dialectics of finitude-transcendence and self-regard and self-giving. This freedom is also radical freedom because it is exercised in the knowledge that such limitations as are the result of realism stand under the grace of God.

This divine grace which allows such freedom also necessitates a second aspect of faith: an attitude of humility. This humility transforms all levels of human transcendence and is the result of realism concerning the potential of the life of faith.

From the position of the life of faith, reason and imagination are to be exercised in an attitude of humility. It is not possible for either reason or imagination to grasp the depth of meaning in the encounter with God. The encounter which results in revelation is one which transcends the analytic or creative capacities of either reason or imagination. At best, such rational activity points beyond itself to a realm which is not subject to understanding. "Religious affirmations avail themselves of symbols and myths, which express both trust in the meaning of life and an awareness of the mystery of the unknowable that surrounds every realm of meaning".[31]

This limitation on reason and imagination has two subsequent effects which make for an attitude of humility. The first is the insight that faith can not make a claim to unconditioned truth. Truth

that relies on rational and imaginative cognition will always be partial and subjective. All statements of belief or truth must always be *our* truth and not *the* truth. We can never present our knowledge as absolute or universal. In this presentation of conditioned knowledge we affirm a second factor which promotes humility. This is the insight that the knowledge which we do have does not come by means of rational processes, but as a gift of grace. This means that the truth we have in Jesus Christ is not one which we can verify by rational exposition. This truth of God's love and grace in Christ is verifiable only in the encounter in which one experiences saving grace.

> Religion validates itself in spiritual experience and moral triumph. Speculation and deduction contribute to religious certainty only after experience has laid the foundation for faith.[32]

With the recognition of these two insights concerning reason and imagination, wisdom can be understood as knowledge and truth held conditionally under the grace and love of God which limits all human cognitive potential.

Another concern of transcendent human life, which is held in humility from the perspective of the life of faith, is history.

> In the more profound versions of historical religion it is recognized...that there is no point in history, whatever the cumulations of wisdom and power, in which the finiteness of man is overcome so that he could complete his own life, or in which history as such does not retain the ambiguity of being rooted in nature-necessity on the one hand while pointing towards transcendent, 'eternal' and trans-historical ends on the other hand.[33]

This means that human social projects in history can never claim absolute or exclusive value in relation to other human social projects. All human endeavour in history is parochial and subject to the values and hopes of a particular culture or society. No historical project can claim universality or absolute validity as a norm for others. At best it can be our hope that historical projects approximate what God is doing in history. But our historical projects are never free from

the will-to-power, self-regard and limitations of finite, particular life.

A final aspect of transcendent life, expressed in humility in the life of faith, is ethical and moral endeavour. The moral and ethical endeavour of human beings is placed under judgement by the encounter with God. In Christ we experience a self-giving love which reveals the relative and self-centred nature of human morality. This self-giving love stands as a religious ideal which both judges human ethical endeavour and inspires it. This love judges human moral action because it is a love which humans can never realise in their relationships. The human being is never free of the self-regard and limited perspectives which influence his or her motives and actions. For this reason, self-giving love always exists on the edge of human history and yet is never realized in it. At the same time this love inspires human moral endeavour to greater and greater approximations of self-giving love. This is done in the knowledge and experience of God's love and forgiveness concerning our partial and limited attempts to love.

Niebuhr identifies this ideal of self-giving love as the 'impossible possibility'. It is an ultimate possibility in God, yet a human impossibility in history and nature. This 'impossible possibility' has three immediate moral consequences. The first consequence is that it makes relative all human claim to virtue. Under this perspective of divine self-giving, we know that we are all sinners. Niebuhr asserts that all humanity is equal in terms of the state of sin in relation to God, yet he does differentiate degrees of guilt concerning action in the human relational context. This is the negative side of the divine perspective. The positive side is that we are all children of God as well as sinners. This universal claim both judges us and frees us in our moral life. We know that we have not related to all humanity as our brothers and sisters, and yet we know this is the ethical posture to pursue and approximate in moral endeavours.

> We are all imbedded in the contingent and arbitrary life of animal existence and we have corrupted the harmless imperfections of nature with the corruptions of sin. Yet we are truly 'children of God' and something of the transcendent unity, in which we are one in God, shines through both the evil of nature and the evil in

> man. Our heart goes out to our fellow-man, when seen through the eyes of faith, not only because we see him thus under a transcendent perspective but because we see ourselves under it and know that we are sinners just as he is. Awed by the majesty and goodness of God, something of the pretence of our pretentious self is destroyed and the natural cruelty of our self-righteousness is mitigated by emotions of pity and forgiveness.[34]

This leads to the second consequence of the divine perspective: a greater disinterestedness in moral endeavour. Under the divine perspective we recognize our limitations and confess the evil which is in us. Conscious of the realism concerning our human nature, we are able to seek greater and greater disinterestedness in our relations with others. But this disinterestedness is itself always qualified by realism.

> Wherever the tension between spirit and nature is adequately maintained and the imperatives of spirit are pressed rigorously against the immediate impulses of nature, the result is not only a morality of purer disinterestedness but a religion of grace which seeks to console the human spirit to its inevitable defeat in the world of nature and history.[35]

The third consequence of the divine self-giving love as 'impossible possibility' is the realization that the moral life of love can only occur as the result of a personal encounter with God. We are able to grow in loving due to the love which we have experienced in divine judgement and grace. "...no meticulous obedience to specific moral standards can be a substitute for the self's encounter with God, in which the pretensions and pride of the self are broken and it is set free from self and sin".[36] In this way law and moral principles are recognized as limited human artifacts which serve the transcendent freedom of human morality lived under the grace of God.

To conclude this examination of religious human being, we recognize that humility is the fundamental response to Niebuhr's realism. This humility is held in the recognition of a realistic anthropology which discloses both the possibilities and the limits of human life. In humility we recognize the height of human being. We can affirm the self-transcendence which makes the human in the 'image of God' and a radically free spiritual creature. At the same time we

recognize the organic limitations of human life. We observe that we are subject to weakness, dependence and finiteness. In this regard the human being is involved in the necessities and the contingencies of the world of nature. The last element in anthropological realism is the confession that there is evil within us and that sin characterizes our relations with others. We must confess in humility that this evil and sin is not the result of our organic, finite being, but rather is the result of our unwillingness to acknowledge our dependence, finiteness and insecurity.

Social human being

In the above we have examined the height and depth of Niebuhr's conception of human nature. In this examination of his anthropology we have identified the realism found in human impulse, rationality and religious transcendence. And throughout this study we have briefly mentioned the social or collective dimension of human being. It is now appropriate to examine this dimension because the full scope of human nature takes on new forms and expressions in this context. The human being is always a social creature and the dialectical realism, indicating limit and potential, create the possibility and the necessity of social justice.

The human being is by nature a social creature. As mentioned above, this dimension of human being has its basis in organic human nature initiated in the family. But the human being is not limited to this intimate and organic social cohesion.

> The individual cannot be a true self in isolation. Nor can he live within the confines of the community which 'nature' establishes in the minimal cohesion of family and herd. His freedom transcends these limits of nature, and therefore makes larger and larger social units both possible and necessary. It is precisely because of the essential freedom of man that he requires a contrived order in his community.[37]

Because of this freedom, the human community is developed by means of both organic and artificial coherences. On the organic level the community is a unity by means of relational hierarchy, common memory,

common language, geographical boundaries, and other natural vitalities which encourage collective identity and purpose. On the level of artifact, communities are held together as nation-states in which political structures, law, economic systems, and police power serve to expand and maintain social order and unity.

The individual relates to this community or nation in a dialectical manner; for the community is the source of fulfilment as well as frustration. In terms of fulfilment, the community provides the context in which the self can expand its creativity and freedom. This fulfilment is subject to self-regard and self-giving. From the perspective of self-giving the community provides the social environment of 'common grace' or security which allows the individual to interact with others in increasing creativity. In this way the human being is free to explore his or her indetermined possibilities of growth in an environment of mutual trust and dependence. From the perspective of self-regard, the community provides a context wherein the self can expand its will-to-power and individual significance. The self-regard of human beings achieve this significance by means of identifying the prestige and power of the group with that of the self. In this way the individual finds his or her ambitions realized in the ambitions of the group. The human being is able to vicariously adopt the egoism of the group as its own. This expression of self-regard seeks to universalize the culture and values of the group so that the self experiences transcendence and unity in a social group. This has the result of resolving the self's lack of prestige and sense of finite possibility. It is this desire for fulfilment motivated by self-regard which leads to an exalted valuation of patriotism and the development of civil religion.

> In the imagination of the simple patriot the nation is not a society but Society. Though its values are relative they appear, from his naive perspective, to be absolute. The religious instinct for the absolute is no less potent in patriotic religion than in any other. The nation is always endowed with an aura of the sacred, which is one reason why religions, which claim universality, are so easily captured and tamed by national sentiment, religion and patriotism merging in the process.[38]

While the nation or community provide various means of self-fulfilment through the impulses of self-regard and self-giving, it also establishes limitations to these impulses. This is the source of individual frustration in the relationship with communities. Concerning self-regard, the community or society establishes the artifacts of justice which will subject this impulse to the need for consistency and harmony in social relations. In this way the community inhibits the will-to-power and expansive desires of the individual. The community regulates this impulse to self-regard and limits its expression within parameters which it regards to be good for the society as a whole.

In a similar way the community is the source of frustration concerning expressions of self-giving. But in this case the community does not establish artificial limits. Rather it is organically limited by its very nature as a social group. According to Niebuhr, the social group is always mediocre in its ethical and moral orientation. This is due to the nature of the group as a variegated field of individual moral and ethical positions. This field of varied moral positions results in a group position which seeks to represent an average or mean of the many moralities. This results in an ethical and moral posture which is never as high as the ethics and morals of an individual. The individual human being transcends the group as an ethical and moral agent and finds that the group is unable to follow. In this way the ethical individual is frustrated by the group's mediocrity and inertia in regard to the more transcendent expressions of ethical and moral life.

In this dialectic between the individual and the community, Niebuhr perceives self-regard to be the dominant impulse which leads to inequalities and conflict. In response to this potential for destruction, the community exercises coercion to maintain order and social continuity.

> Our actual human communities are always shot through with disorder and confusion; for the same freedom which enables man to build wider and more complex communities also gives him the power to make his own will, whether individual or collective, the perverse centre of the whole community, whether the whole community be defined in national or international terms. The domination of the

> weak by the strong and the conflict between various wills, interests and forces are the inevitable corruptions of human self-seeking in all historic communities, though tremendous differences may and do exist between forms of justice which preserve a tolerable degree of harmony and those which embody domination or conflict.[39]

To varying degrees, coercion or power is the vitality of political structures and the means by which communities establish justice. While other forms of social cohesion are effective, no society can maintain itself without some form and degree of coercion. Human freedom makes the use of political power necessary in order to maintain social life.

This egoism and self-regard which necessitates coercion and political power within societies is also necessary in relations between communities and nations. According to Niebuhr, coercion is of greater necessity between social groups because groups are far more egoistic and self-regarding than individuals.

> A distinction between group pride and the egotism of individuals is necessary...because the pretensions and claims of a collective or social self exceed those of the individual ego. The group is more arrogant, hypocritical, self-centred and more ruthless in the pursuit of its ends than the individual.[40]

For Niebuhr, the group is less capable of self-transcendence than the individual. This means that the group responds less to the transcendent qualities of human being. It responds less to rational and spiritual impulse and more to emotional and organic impulse. For this reason the will-to-live is more easily transmuted into the will-to-power by the group. This also means that the group tends to respond to immediate needs and impulses without reflection concerning long term consequence. This inevitable tendency of groups to egoism and self-regard results in the exercise of coercion between groups. Groups and nations are unable to realize the ethical conscience of individuals and therefore artifacts of justice and coercion become the means of international relations.

This is not to say that other forms of coherence are unable to mitigate the use of coercion. While coercion is always present in national and international structures and relations, it can have a greater or lesser presence depending on the vitality of other forms of

social cohesion. These forms of cohesion are found in both organic and transcendent levels of human existence.

In organic human being we find social coherence encouraged by family relationships and feeling, hierarchies maintaining loyalties, and common land, language, memories and hopes. This aspect of organic coherence finds its ethical expression in the human conscience. Through the vitality of the conscience one feels responsibility in relation to others in the intimate group. It is the human conscience which makes society possible. But the effectiveness of the conscience is limited to intimate communities. As society becomes more complex, the conscience is less able to regulate human relationships. Growing complexity means that humans do not experience the results of their actions. Their actions are part of a complex web of political, economic, and technological relationships and they can not perceive the multiple results of even one act. In this way the individual becomes increasingly separated from others in the complexity of social relationships and feels little responsibility concerning actions of which he or she may never know the result. In this manner conscience is only effective in the intimate group where one perceives the result of action in the life of another human being.

Another force of cohesion in communities and nations which can extend the concerns of conscience is the use of reason. Reason is able to create artifacts of justice wherein the concerns of conscience can be implemented. Through the creation of political structures and legal systems reason subjects the various conflictive impulses to an ideal of justice. It accomplishes this by resolving conflict between the various interests in society. It arbitrates the conflict of life with life and helps approximate greater and greater social harmony. But reason also has its limits. While it is useful in analysing and resolving conflict, it is very often the servant of an interested party in society. Reason is always limited by its lack of objectivity. It is always subject to the dialectics of realism.

A final source of social unity is that of religious cohesion. Religious vitalities have the capacity to extend conscience and qualify reason. By introducing absolute ideals, the religious imagination makes repentance and forgiveness a force of social cohesion.

> Even at best human nature is so imperfect and relations between groups as well as individuals so fruitful in misunderstandings that it is impossible to maintain the mutual trust and confidence which are the basis of society without the spiritual achievement of mutual repentance and forgiveness.[41]

But as with reason, religious vitalities are also subject to distortion by the social group.

> Nations and classes, cultures and civilization are usually able to use religion, not to reveal the imperfection and partiality of their life and values, but to give the prestige of the absolute to what is relative and tentative.[42]

This completes our overview of Niebuhr's anthropological realism. At the heart of this realism we have perceived dialectical forces which permeate all levels of human existence. In the dialectics of self-regard and self-giving, and finitude-transcendence, we begin to perceive the height and depth of human being. This realism qualifies the expectations of justice and directs the attempts at greater and more inclusive justice.

Given this anthropological basis, we are now able to examine how Niebuhr establishes the values which define his concept of justice. In the above chapter we have identified the human vitalities which make for community and order. We have also identified the limitations of such vitalities. Now we can examine the values which human vitality, freedom, and creativity are to serve.

NOTES

1. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. I, New York, Scribner's, 1941, page 7.
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3. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Reflections on the End of an Era*, London, Scribner's, 1934, page 17.
4. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, New York, Scribner's, 1932, page 25.
5. Niebuhr, *Reflections on the End of an Era*, op. cit., page 270.
6. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics*, New York, Scribner's, 1940, page 177.
7. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy*, London, Nisbet and Co. Ltd., 1938, page 95.
8. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. I, op. cit., page 55.
9. Niebuhr, *Reflections on the End of an Era*, op. cit., page 274.
10. Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, London, Student Christain Movement Press, 1936, pages 100 and 101.
11. Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, op. cit., page 28.
12. Niebuhr, *Reflections on the End of an Era*, op. cit., page 17.
13. Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, op. cit., page 44.
14. Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics*, op. cit., page 148.
15. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. II, op. cit., page 1.
16. Reinhold Niebuhr, "Intellectual Autobiography", in *Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social, and Political Thought*, Charles W. Kegley, Robert W. Bretall ed., New York, MacMillan, 1956, page 11.
17. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and History*, London, Nisbet and Co. Ltd., 1949, page 133.
18. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Nations and Empires*, London, Faber and Faber, 1960, page 133.
19. Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, op. cit., page 76.
20. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. II, op. cit., page 38.
21. Niebuhr, *Reflections on the End of an Era*, op. cit., page 200.
22. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. I, op. cit., page 127.
23. Ibid., page 131.
24. Niebuhr, *Reflections on the End of an Era*, op. cit., page 114.
25. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. II, op. cit., page 36.
26. Ibid., Vol. I, op. cit., page 130.
27. Niebuhr, "Intellectual Autobiography", op. cit., page 20.
28. Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, op. cit., page 95.
29. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. I, op. cit., page 17.
30. Reinhold Niebuhr, "Coherence, Incoherence, and Christian Faith", *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, Vol. VII, No. 2, New York, Jan. 1953, page 11.

31. Reinhold Niebuhr, "Faith as the Sense of Meaning in Human Existence", *Christianity and Crisis*, Vol. XXVI, No. 10, 13 June 1966, page 127.

32. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Does Civilization Need Religion*, New York, MacMillan, 1929, page 217.

33. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. II, op. cit., page 4.

34. Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, op. cit., page 230.

35. Niebuhr, *Reflections on the End of an Era*, op. cit., page 279.

36. Niebuhr, "Intellectual Autobiography", op. cit., page 22.

37. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, New York, Scribner's, 1944, page 5.

38. Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, op. cit., pages 96 and 97.

39. Reinhold Niebuhr, "God's Design and the Present Disorder of Civilization", in *Man's Disorder and God's Design: The Church and the Disorder of Society*, Vol. III, World Council of Churches, London, SCM Press Ltd., 1948, pages 15 and 16.

40. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. I, op. cit., page 208.

41. Niebuhr, *Does Civilization Need Religion*, op. cit., page 154.

42. Niebuhr, *Reflections on the End of an Era*, op. cit., page 10.

2. THE VALUES OF JUSTICE

The consideration of values of justice leads to a recognition of the comprehensive dialectic which functions as the structure for Niebuhr's theology. In his theology we find a dialectical relationship between anthropological realism and religious idealism. As has been observed in the previous chapter, this dialectic is not one of exclusive opposites. But rather it is a recognition of conceptual foci which maintain a fluctuating and varied relationship. This dialectical relationship exhibits mutual opposition, modification and interpenetration. This dialectic is perceived throughout Niebuhr's theology. In its most comprehensive form, it is the dialectic of anthropological realism and religious idealism. In the previous chapter we examined this dialectic with the emphasis upon realism. In this chapter we will examine Niebuhr's concern for religious idealism.

Religious idealism is itself subject to this Niebuhrian dialectic. To refer to this basis of values as 'idealism' is to say that it is the product of human reason and contingent to cultural and social relativities. To call this basis of values 'religious' is to refer to experience of transcendent, divine encounter. In this way religious idealism is both the product of human conceptualization and divine revelation. Niebuhr affirms the divine revelation of a transcendent relational norm. Yet this divine revelation occurs in human history with all its relativities and anthropocentric concerns. Because of this relativizing context, the 'truth' of this relational norm is always embraced through faith actualized by the personal encounter with the divine. It is never knowledge which is the result of a rational idealism. The apprehension of the meaning and coherence of reality is of necessity anthropomorphic, and yet, it is apprehension of transcendent reality and true knowledge.

This relational norm, which is the focus of religious idealism, is love. Niebuhr calls this norm the 'law of life'. It is the

explication of this relational concept which will be pursued throughout the body of this chapter. Initially it must be understood that Niebuhr perceives love to be both a transcendent 'impossible possibility' and an immanent harmonious element in the very nature of humanity and the cosmos. In this way the values of justice, which grow out of the norm of love, have their beginnings in organic human life and are verified and transformed by their fulfilment in the divine life. In this way the law of life is the ground for the values of justice in their varied realizations in different human relational contexts. In the following pages we will explore these different human relational settings and the various values of justice utilized to approximate the norm of love.

Values of intimate justice

Intimate justice is the expression of the 'law of life' in intimate communities. In these communities, love is most directly related to justice.

> Where human relations are intimate (and love is fully effective only in intimate and personal relations), the way of love may be the only way to justice. Where rights and interests are closely interwoven, it is impossible to engage in a shrewd and prudent calculation of comparative rights. Where lives are closely intertwined, happiness is destroyed if it is not shared.'

In intimate communities we find what Niebuhr calls 'brotherhood', 'kinship', and 'family'. It is in this form of human relationship that we apprehend the organic interconnectedness of social life. In this relationship the human being expresses the natural benevolence and altruism that results from direct personal contact with others in the community.

This intimate community is not a simple option for human life, but a necessity.

> Community is an individual as well as social necessity; for the individual can realize himself only in intimate and organic relation with his fellowmen. Love is therefore the primary law of his nature; and brotherhood the fundamental requirement of his social existence.[2]

This intimate community has its first expression in the family. With the family as the organic model, the intimate community is nothing more than an enlarged family with kinship feeling as the force of cohesion.

It is this phenomenon of community, growing out of intimate human social life, which is the focal value of intimate justice. In community, the mutual love which justice seeks to approximate finds its most natural and spontaneous expression. In community, the conflict of life with life is resolved in the mutuality of 'family' which seeks the good of all. Here, justice is not concerned with principles or explicit values. Rather, justice is implicit in the relationships of intimate social life and verified by the experience of the group. The social group recognizes in its own experience that it is intrinsically good to respect the lives, opinions, and interests of others. And thus the intimate community prohibits violence to other's life, opinions and interests.

It is in intimate community that Niebuhr understands justice to most closely approximate love. For this reason, organic community is the first value of justice upon which other forms of justice in social relationships must be built. But this phenomenon of community becomes increasingly difficult as a society enlarges and becomes more complex. In larger societies, the direct personal relationships, characteristic of intimate communities, become more and more difficult. This necessitates that the implicit relational values of intimate social life become explicit. The explicit identification of these values orients society in the regulation of justice to approximate love in the context of increasingly complex social life. These extended values of intimate justice are identified as the values of social justice.

Values of social justice

The values of social justice are values which must be explicitly stated in the context of expanded community where intimacy has become increasingly difficult. These values have their source in the different aspects of human existence and must be explicitly stated. By identifying the values of human life in extended and complex social relations, society is guided in its structures and systems to act in

such a way as to approximate the law of love. Niebuhr understands that it is impossible for society to approximate love in the way and to the extent that an intimate community is able. Because society consists of complex and fragmented human relationships, it is impossible for society to realize the mutuality and organic life in which love is functional. For complex society, justice is the best approximation of love. This justice seeks, by means of rational calculation, to implement principles, laws, political structures and economic systems which will serve the values of social justice. In this way calculating prudence extends and builds upon the justice of intimate communities.

This is not to say that social justice replaces intimate justice. Social justice deals with extended community and guides society to approximate love through structures and systems of law, government and economics. But extended society can not exist soley on these structures and systems. Extended society must always be built upon the natural organic forces of cohesion which create community.

The values which inform the implementation of social justice are three in number; freedom or liberty, equality, and order. These values have their basis in three different sources. Freedom has its grounding in the human individual, equality is the rational extension of the value of intimate community, and order is the primary value of extended social life.

The value of freedom has its source in the transcendent freedom of human beings. The degree of this freedom has been examined in depth in the previous chapter. It is important at this point to emphasize that freedom can be more or less extensive depending on the social setting. Niebuhr understands that the exercise of freedom is a phenomenon which is capable of growth or diminishment according to the structures and systems of a society. He also understands that this freedom is necessary for both individuals and for the community as a whole.

> Both the individual and the community require freedom so that neither communal nor historical restraints may prematurely arrest the potencies which inhere in man's essential freedom and which express themselves collectively as well as individually.[3]

In this manner society holds freedom as a value in order that human individuals and societies might have the liberty to pursue their various potentialities to the full. This value of freedom corresponds directly to another value, the value of the individual. To value freedom in a society is to affirm and respect the individual's ability to transcend the determinative realities of life and to be a creator of life. In this way freedom or liberty is the first value to consider concerning social justice. Social justice seeks to preserve the social environment wherein human beings are free to fulfil their natural potentials.

While Niebuhr recognizes this value of freedom as the first value to consider concerning society, at the same time he recognizes that this value necessitates consideration of a second value which is of equal significance. "Since human beings live in a society in which other human beings are competing with them for the opportunity of a fuller development of life, the next highest good is equality;...".[4] It is the transcendent freedom of human beings which makes the value of equality necessary. In extended and complex social life human beings compete to realize their potential without the mitigating forces of intimate community. In this extended society they may gain at the expense of others without ever being conscious of the cost of their gain. In this complex society, it becomes increasingly difficult to base a concern for mutuality on intimate relationships. This necessitates that the mutual love and concern of the intimate community be explicitly stated as a value for social life. This is the value of equality.

For Niebuhr, the value of equality is the rational expression of the law of love applied in a social setting where intimate relationships are difficult due to conflict and social complexity.

> Since the law of love demands that all life be affirmed, the principle that all conflicting claims of life be equally affirmed is a logical approximation of the law of love in a world in which conflict is inevitable.[5]

This value serves as the guide for the development of systems and structures which seek to preserve mutuality in human social relations.

For Niebuhr, the preservation of mutuality centres on the distribution and maintenance of power in society. This power is to be understood basically as economic and political power. It is human freedom which allows individuals and groups to obtain inordinate power and thus introduce injustice into social relationships. The value of equality resists injustice by promoting systems and structures which seek to maintain an equilibrium of economic and political power in society.

Niebuhr understands both the values of freedom and equality to be limited in actual application. Either of these values pursued exclusively to their maximum possible expression would destroy community. Freedom applied absolutely to community would result in chaos and anarchy. Equality applied absolutely would allow no freedom. In this way we see that freedom and equality exist in a dialectical relationship wherein growth in one results in the diminishment of the other. Growth in freedom means less equality as individuals realize their natural inequalities and exploit these differences in the social setting. Growth in equality means less freedom as individuals are restricted by principles of mutuality.

For Niebuhr, the value of equality is a rational ideal which must be approximated but never actualized. He understands that not only will there always be inequality, but also that inequality is necessary for the existence of social life.

> Equality, being a rational, political version of the law of love, shares with it the quality of transcendence. It ought to be, but it never will be fully realized. Social prudence will qualify it. The most equalitarian society will probably not be able to dispense with special rewards as inducements to diligence. Some differentials in privilege will be necessary to make the performance of certain social functions possible.[5]

In this way the value of equality serves as a criterion of criticism for the necessary inequalities of society encouraging greater and greater approximations of social equality.

The third value of social justice is that of order. Order is a value which has its grounding in the existence of the extended social community. It is a value of exclusively social origin and is the

primary value from the perspective of society. "...order must always remain the first value of any community, (because chaos is tantamount to nonexistence),... ".[7]

This value of order has its primary expression in political structures and the utilization of power. Through the construction of hierarchical political authorities and the implementation of political and economic force, justice as social harmony is approximated.

> The question of politics is how to coerce the anarchy of conflicting human interests into some kind of order, offering human beings the greatest possible opportunity for mutual support. In the field of collective behaviour the force of egoistic passion is so strong that the only harmonies possible are those which manage to neutralize this force through balances of power, through mutual defences against its inordinate expression, and through techniques for harnessing its energy to social ends. All these possibilities represent something less than the ideal of love. Yet the law of love is involved in all approximations of justice, not only as the source of the norms of justice, but as an ultimate perspective by which their limitations are discovered.[8]

Niebuhr has no illusions concerning this use of coercion or force. He knows it to be an evil.

> Since power is a necessity of social cohesion a rational politics must accept it as a necessary evil. But it must know that it is an evil; and that injustice inevitably flows from its unchecked expression.[9]

This brings us to consider the value of order in relation to the values of freedom and equality. This value of order both results from the tension between freedom and equality and also serves to limit both these values. It is the value of order which results from the social need to organize relationships around the values of equality and freedom. Order is necessary for these values to be expressed in ways which are conducive to social harmony. In this way order is the servant of the values of freedom and equality. But order can also be the primary value which subjugates all other values. To maintain peace and obtain security society can value order at the exclusion of freedom. In similar manner, society can value the political hierarchy of authority, which inevitably makes for privilege, at the cost of equality.

Niebuhr understands that these values of social justice; freedom, equality, and order, have no ideal application in terms of a hierarchy of importance. He perceives that societies structure their hierarchy of values in relation to historical concerns and perceptions. This will be explored further under the heading of the implementation of justice.

Values of inter-group justice

Corresponding to our study of group behaviour in chapter one, it is this relational context wherein we find the most difficulty approximating the law of love. All the above values of justice apply to inter-group relations, but they find very little utility by groups. As Niebuhr has made clear, groups and nations lack the self-transcendence which leads individuals to moral behaviour.

> Every group, as every individual, has expansive desires which are rooted in the instinct of survival and soon extend beyond it. The will-to-live becomes the will-to-power.[10]

> As individuals, men believe that they ought to love and serve each other and establish justice between each other. As racial, economic and national groups they take for themselves, whatever their power can command.[11]

This impulse to self-regard is mitigated within social groups by intimate community, principles of freedom and equality, and the political forces of order. But in inter-group relationships these forces of cohesion either do not exist or are very weak. The most significant lack is in intimate and organic cohesion. The sense of communal 'family' or 'kinship' is very difficult to extend beyond the boundary of the group. This means that groups lack the basic organic cohesive forces which create unity and solidarity. They lack the common language, geographic boundaries, common history, etc. In the same manner the values of social justice are also limited. The values of equality, freedom and order, all depend on the cohesiveness of a political and social structure. As yet this only exists in very limited form. Thus we see that the values of intimate and social justice are very limited when applied to inter-group relationships.

Niebuhr does not reject these forces as means of justice in world community. He is merely recognizing their limited application in present global politics. Niebuhr understands that international justice can occur as the organic community of intimate justice grows and provides the base for the other forms of social justice.

> If we are patient enough we would cultivate the gradually growing organic factors of world community and perfect them at opportune moments by the constitutional contrivances which always express and perfect what the forces of life and togetherness have established.[12]

While this indicates Niebuhr's agenda for the growth of justice in the future it does not deal with how justice finds present inter-group expression. Without the organic cohesiveness of intimate justice and the contrived cohesiveness of social justice there is only one means of mitigating the expansive desires of groups. This is through the use of coercive force; political, economic, and military. Between groups, as they presently exist in international relations, power becomes the value of justice which approximates the law of love.

> It is at any rate quite clear that only the preponderant power of the great nations can be an adequate core of authority for a minimal world order. The vitalities of the world community are too diverse, the cultural and ethnic forces too heterogeneous and the elements of common tradition and experience too minimal to allow us to dispense with the policy of establishing preponderant collective power as the initial basis of world order.[13]

Niebuhr understands that this value of power is just as dangerous in the international setting as it is within society. While it can be used for greater unity and justice, it can not help but produce injustice by the very fact that it is coercive. As with the use of power and force in the service of the value of order, the use of coercion in the international setting becomes a necessary evil until more just forces of cohesion exist. For this reason Niebuhr understands that balance of power is the means of mutuality between nations and groups and the minimal approximation of the law of love.

The relational norm of religious faith and the transformation of the values of justice

In the above we have examined the law of love as the law of life which is organic and immanent in human existence. We have seen how this law of love finds its most direct possible expression in the intimate justice of organic communities. We have observed that as communities become more complex and extended this intimate justice becomes the rationalized and institutionalized justice of societies. And we saw that this law of love is finally reduced to power politics in international relationships. Niebuhr understands that this law of love finds its optimal social expression as mutual love. As far as intimate communities, political societies, or international relations are concerned, mutual love is the highest possible expression of justice.

> From the standpoint of history mutual love is the highest good. Only in mutual love, in which the concern of one person for the interest of another prompts and elicits a reciprocal affection, are the social demands of historical existence satisfied.'[14]

In this mutual love the familial relation of life with life is approximated by the means of the values of justice.

To this point we have examined only the immanent form of love which is organic to human nature as the harmony of life with life. Now we must turn to examine this same love from the transcendent perspective. Just as God is understood as both immanent and transcendent, in like manner is love to be understood. And in the same way that the transcendent nature of God is revealed in human history, so too is the nature of love revealed. This theological correspondence obtains because love is revealed as intrinsic both to the nature of God and also intrinsic to the nature of human beings as the 'image of God'.

The law of life is revealed, from the transcendent perspective, to be sacrifical or self-giving love. This clarification of the depth of love is revealed in God's self-revelation. In the Cross of Jesus Christ we apprehend the nature of God as love. We also apprehend a love which transcends the mutual love attempted in human relationships.

> The Cross symbolizes the perfection of *agape* which transcends all particular norms of justice and mutuality in history. It rises above history and seeks conformity to the Divine love rather than harmony with other human interests and vitalities.[15]

This *agape* or sacrificial love is the final norm for human existence. The human being, in his or her transcendent freedom, always finds the laws and calculations of mutual love to be insufficient. The norm of self-giving love transcends human history corresponding to human transcendence. The love which calls the human to self-giving cannot be contained within the logic of mutual interest. This self-giving seeks the good of the other without calculating the gain or loss to self.

This form of love is only possible from the perspective of religious faith. Self-giving love can not be validated in historical life. It can only be validated as part of a divine life which is understood as source and goal of all life. Thus love is possible due to the grace of God revealed in the Cross of Christ and is possible because of the faith this Cross engenders. In the Cross of Christ we realize ourselves as children of God and are given hope which encourages a life of love. From this perspective, forms of mutual love, systems of justice, and principles and laws, always fall short of the transcendent norm of love.

Niebuhr understands this norm of self-giving love to be the very focus of christocentric religious idealism.

> In the teachings of Jesus the love ideal is stated unqualifiedly and loyalty to it is demanded without a suggestion of those compromises which political realities seem to make inevitable. Men are to love their neighbours as themselves, they are not to resist evil, not to resent injustice, not to desire concrete and obvious rewards, in short not to assert the ego against the life around it.[16]

But this love is not to be understood as a transcendent element which is alien to history and human life. It is not a love which is exclusively known in the revelation of the Cross.

> ...the *agape* of Christ is not arbitrarily imposed upon life. It is 'from the beginning'; that is, it is given in the essential and created nature of man, which involves a freedom for which love is

> the only law. But the historic revelation clarifies that commandment... .[17]

Niebuhr understands that it is only from the perspective of faith that one apprehends that the self-giving love revealed in God is in fact the law of life. This law of life has always been present in human existence and approximated in the various forms of human love. But it is only in the Cross that we apprehend self-giving love which is free from self-regard. It is only in the Cross that love is given to us without the mutual calculus of gain and loss. This self-giving love of the Cross transcends any concept of justice.

It is from this perspective that we apprehend self-giving love in dialectical relationship with mutual love and justice. As the revelation of transcendent divine love, it is trans-historical and more than any 'norm', principle, or law, can explain or grasp. In this sense self-giving love is not a historical or human possibility. All human love and social expressions of that love will be qualified by self-regard and the self-contradiction of human nature. The unconditional self-giving of the Cross is a divine possibility, not a human one. In this way, self-giving love always stands as a norm against which all human love and justice is assessed.

But to identify this love as a 'norm' is also to say that it is a standard to which it is possible to have greater approximation in social life. For Niebuhr this means that the norm of self-giving love has direct relevance to human social existence. It is not to be understood as an exclusively transcendent reality.

> ...the prophetic tradition in Christianity must insist on the relevance of the ideal of love to the moral experience of mankind on every conceivable level. It is not an ideal magically superimposed upon life by a revelation which has no relation to total human experience. The whole conception of life revealed in the Cross of Christian faith is not a pure negation of, or irrelevance toward, the moral ideals of 'natural man'. While the final heights of the love ideal condemn as well as fulfil the moral concerns of common sense, the ideal is involved in every moral aspiration and achievement. It is the genius and the task of prophetic religion to insist on the organic relation between historic existence and that which is both the ground and the fulfilment of this existence, the transcendent.[18]

In relation to mutual love, self-giving love serves as both judge and inspiration. Self-giving love serves as a norm which uncovers the self-regard which exists in all forms of mutual love and helps prevent that self-regard from destroying greater approximations to self-giving love. In this correcting and inspiring role, self-giving love is to be understood as the force which maintains the possibility of mutual love in social life.

> The most direct relationship of love to the problems of community would seem to be the purifying effect of sacrificial love upon mutual love. Mutual love and loyalty are, in a sense, the highest possibilities of social life, rising above the rational calculations and the power-balances of its rough justice. The grace of sacrifical love prevents mutual love from degenerating into a mere calculation of mutual advantages. If mutual love is not constantly replenished by impulses of grace in which there are no calculation of mutual advantages, mutual relations degenerate first to the cool calculation of such advantages and finally to resentment over the inevitable lack of complete reciprocity, in all actual relations.'[19]

In this way we see that mutual and self-giving love stand in a dialectical relationship. Absolute self-giving love is a historical impossibility and yet mutual love has indeterminate possibility of growth in terms of greater and greater approximation to self-giving love. This self-giving love is at once a quality of relationship which is beyond human reach and also the basis for all human relationships. It is, as Niebuhr describes it, an 'impossible possibility'. It is a love toward which we are drawn and yet in which we do not find fulfilment till we receive it as grace from God.

In this dialectical relation, self-giving love is apprehended as the the norm which is the ground and fulfilment of all social expressions of mutual love. Thus it is from this perspective of the Cross and the norm of self-giving love that all values of justice are given reinterpretation.

The first value to be reinterpreted from the perspective of the Cross and religious faith is the value of community. In its organic and intimate form, this value represented the natural coherences of familial love. Under the religious norm of self-giving love, this value is expanded to universal proportions.

> 'If ye love them that love you, what reward have ye?' declared Jesus; and in the logic of those words the whole social genius of the Christian religion is revealed. The transcendent perspective of religion makes all men our brothers and nullifies the divisions, by which nature, climate, geography and the accidents of history divide the human family.[20]

Under the unconditional self-giving love of the Cross, humanity is made aware of its failure at community. In light of this Cross human self-regard is confessed and it is acknowledged that there can be no calculus of deserved love. The grace of God is known in the Cross as self-giving love which no one has deserved and yet all have received. From the perspective of this universal love, it is impossible to make exclusive claims against others. All humans stand under the Cross as the revelation of human self-regard and sin, and also as the revelation of a divine grace inclusive of all human beings. In this revelation in Jesus Christ, God is revealed as parent and lover of the human family. In this way the value of community is expanded and the kinship and familial obligations extended to all other human beings.

The second value to be reinterpreted is that of freedom. This value was recognized to originate in the self-transcendence of human being. As a basic element of human existence, freedom finds new importance and expression under the perspective of faith.

> Christianity is responsible for a heightened sense of individuality because, according to the Christian faith, the human spirit in its freedom is finally bound only by the will of God, and the secret of its heart is only fully known and judged by the divine wisdom.[21]

Within the value structure of faith, the individual is held in value and recognized as an individual mystery known only to God. In identifying the individual human being with God, the value of individuality is raised above the mutual respect and obligation of rational prudence. From the perspective of faith, obligation to the other is grounded in the self-giving love of God.

It is in this self-giving love that human freedom is most fully exercised. This love is the final norm for freedom because human relationships transcend explicit principles or law. In this regard

love transcends obedience to rules. Rules can never hope to grasp the possibilities of human social life.

> Love is the only final structure of freedom. Human personality as a system of infinite potentialities makes it impossible to define absolutely what I owe to my fellow-man, since nothing that he now is exhausts what he might be. Human personality as capacity for infinite self-transcendence makes it impossible from my own standpoint to rest content in any ordered relation with my fellow-men.[22]

This freedom to love has its ground in the self-giving love of God. In the encounter with God the individual realizes that his or her self-seeking freedom leads to greater anxiety and less freedom. And that only by self-giving can the individual realize the fullness of freedom in the greater context of God. In this way the love of God provides the faith and hope which makes freedom possible. Through faith one understands personal freedom to correspond to the harmonies and coherences of creation. This faith also provides a vision of the future which encourages hope. In this context of faith the individual can grow in self-giving love, trusting in an unconditional transcendent love.

Under this perspective the value of freedom is given new vitality. It is understood as the indeterminate potential of humanity to love one another and approximate self-giving love in all forms of justice. This freedom indicates the human capacity to explore and create new social forms which would approximate greater and greater justice in spite of the inertia found in human nature and existence.

The third value to be reinterpreted is that of equality. The norm of self-giving love both reaffirms this value and negates it at the same time. Equality is a value of faith in the sense that the Cross declares the equal need characteristic of human beings. The Cross makes explicit the fact of the equal status of human sin. Before the Cross all human beings stand judged and are in need of divine mercy. Correspondingly, all human beings receive the grace of God whereby forgiveness of sins is realized. In terms of the divine-human relationship it is not possible to claim privilege. From a theological perspective, the value of equality is affirmed.

What is true from the theological perspective is not true for the social perspective. The norm of self-giving love stands in opposition to the value of equal justice. Equality in society is less than the love of the Cross. This equality is at best a rational form of mutual love where interests are calculated and balanced. The norm of self-giving love must always stand in critique of this form of equality. Self-giving love is not concerned with the balance of interests or of mutual concern. This love is always concerned for the other more than itself and desires the good of the other before it seeks its own interest. For this reason it is impossible for the norm of self-giving love to be the focus of a social ethic. Its role must always be one of judge in relation to the concern for equality in society.

> ...sacrificial love, as exemplified by the love of Christ, the *agape* of the New Testament, is too pure to be a guide for the ordering of the affairs of the community. These require the norms of justice and the mutualities of *philia* rather than the pure transcendence over self of the New Testament *agape*. It is, in short, very difficult, if not impossible, to construct an adequate social ethic, requiring a careful calculation of competing rights, from an *agape* ethic.[23]

The fourth value of justice to be reinterpreted is that of order. Order is the primary value of society and realized in the construction of political structures and economic systems. As with social equality, this value has no place in the norm of self-giving love. The structures and systems of social order always include hierarchies of authority and privilege, and the use of coercion. Neither of these aspects of social order can be justified by the norm of love. At best, order is to be understood as a means of approximating mutual love and justice. This relationship between the norm of self-giving love and the structures and systems of order is one of judgement. The norm of self-giving love continually reminds society of its need to seek greater approximations of love. In this role the norm of self-giving love is always the reminder that order is a human artifact and subject to the limitations and relativities of human life.

> ...God's order can never be identified with some specific form of social organisation. It is very important to arrive at concepts of justice which draw upon the common experience of mankind and

> set a restraint upon human self-interest. But it must be recognised that, in so far as such principles of justice are given specific historical meaning, they also become touched by historical contingency.[24]

The last value of justice to be reinterpreted is that of power. This is the value of international justice where power exists as the sole functional source for mitigating human expansive impulses. While this value is recognized as a necessary evil, it is non-the-less rejected by the norm of self-giving love. Self-giving love must stand against power because power is coercive in its very nature. Power consists in the coercive force of military, economic and political threat. The Cross knows no such coercion. The power of the Cross is not the force of coercion, but rather the ability to create new life. This power is the power of knowledge of the law of life and the security of God's sovereignty. It is faith empowered by the *agape* of Christ. It is the knowledge that life and history will find its fulfilment in God. From the perspective of the norm of self-giving love there is no place in religious faith for a value of power expressed in coercion.

This brings to a conclusion our examination of Niebuhr's religious idealism. We have now reached the point where we can turn to examine the implementation of justice. Our concern in the next chapter will be to see how Niebuhr implements justice in human life between the dialectic of anthropological realism and religious idealism.

NOTES

1. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, New York, Scribner's, 1932, page 266.
2. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. I, New York, Scribner's, 1941, page 244.
3. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, New York, Scribner's, 1944, page 4.
4. Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, London, Student Christian Movement Press, 1936, page 157.
5. Ibid., page 159.
6. Ibid., page 118.
7. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Nations and Empires*, London, Faber and Faber, 1960, pages 5 and 6.
8. Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, op. cit., page 174.
9. Ibid.
10. Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, op. cit., page 18.
11. Ibid., page 15.
12. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Self and the Dramas of History*, London, Faber and Faber, 1956, page 233.
13. Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, op. cit., pages 177 and 178.
14. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. I, op. cit., pages 68 and 69.
15. Ibid., page 74.
16. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Reflections on the End of an Era*, London, Scribner's, 1934, page 211.
17. Niebuhr, *The Self and the Dramas of History*, op. cit., page 108.
18. Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, op. cit., pages 114 and 115.
19. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and History*, London, Nisbet and Co. Ltd., 1949, page 210.
20. Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, op. cit., page 71.
21. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. I, op. cit., page 57.
22. Reinhold Niebuhr, "Christian Faith and Natural Law", *Theology: A Journal of Historic Christianity*, Vol. XL, No. 236, Guildford and Esher, Billing and Sons Ltd., Feb. 1940, page 89.
23. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Godly and the Ungodly*, London, Faber and Faber, 1960, page 140.
24. Reinhold Niebuhr, "God's Design and the Present Disorder of Civilization", in *Man's Disorder and God's Design: The Church and The Disorder of Society*, Vol. III, World Council of Churches, London, SCM Press Ltd., 1948, page 14.

3. THE IMPLEMENTATION OF JUSTICE

In Niebuhr's theology the social implementation of justice occurs between the realism of human sin, finiteness and self-contradiction, and the absolute transcendent ideal of self-giving love. Within this tension, human community is to struggle with the establishment of the various forms of social order which will mitigate the destructive impulses of human beings and encourage the creative and familial impulses. This is easy to state, but difficult to implement. In Niebuhr's long theological career, the implementation of justice was a concern continually being rethought and restated. While his anthropological realism and religious idealism saw changes in emphasis, but little substantial change in content, his understanding of the implementation of social justice between these dialectical concerns saw radical change. In Niebuhr's early works, such as *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, we find an explicit socialist approach to the implementation of justice. This is to be contrasted with his works following the Second World War when he promoted a form of welfare capitalism.

This flexibility in the implementation of justice originates in his dialectical theology. For Niebuhr there can be no absolute or ideal political, economic, or social system in the tension between anthropological realism and religious idealism. Within this tension, human beings can only approximate the ideal of love through systems and structures which inherently distort and prevent the ideal they seek to realize. For Niebuhr this means that ethics must be fundamentally pragmatic. While the 'end' of justice can be stated with some clarity, the 'means' to achieve that 'end' is relative and obscure. For this reason social creativity seeks the systems and structures which provide the optimal harmony of life with life. But the identification of these social systems and structures is not accomplished by means of the implementation of abstract theory. Rather, the success of social

systems and structures is dependent on the determative factors of history.

For Niebuhr, justice is implemented within a historical context and is dependent on that context for the form in which justice finds successful expression. Human beings are creators and creatures of history and it is in this context that social life is constructed and maintained. For Niebuhr this means that the ethic of justice is an ethic which is both transcendent and historical. It is to a detailed examination of this ethic which we will now turn.

Ethics of Niebuhrian realism

To state that an ethic of justice has a transcendent dimension is to recognize the norm of self-giving love as the measure of ethical action. This norm transcends history and human existence and is the norm by which all human action is judged. Human behaviour and social creativity function under this relational ideal which both inspires and judges the effectiveness of ethical endeavour. But this endeavour does not occur in a moment of existential isolation, but rather in the continuity of time. Therefore, ethics must also be a historical phenomenon and have horizontal, historical foci of reference as well as vertical, existential foci.

This move from transcendent to historical context for ethics is not a negation of the dialectic of anthropological realism and religious idealism. It is rather the reflection on this same dialectic from a different perspective. Human life has both transcendent and historical qualities. But a social ethic of justice finds its operative environment in history. For Niebuhr, the human being is most significantly a historical being. "Man is primarily a historical creature. He plays his role against some ontological background, but his real milieu is history".[1] Therefore an ethic of Niebuhrian realism must make this dialectic explicit in its historical context. In order to accomplish this, the dialectics of anthropological realism and religious idealism must be restated and identified as historical phenomenon and defined in terms of ethical significance.

The first reference point in this theological ethic is the concept of creation. Niebuhr understands time and history to be the creation of God. From this perspective one can speak of universal history as God's history in his relationship with his creation. Within this universal history we find the particular, limited, and parochial histories of human groups.

This recognition of reality as divine creation has two immediate ethical implications. The first of these is the recognition of mystery concerning the intelligibility of the cosmos.

> ...belief in divine creation points to a realm of mystery which is at once the beginning and the end of any system of meaning and which prevents it from being reduced to a too simple system of rational intelligibility.[2]

This recognition of the limitation of rationality concerning the coherence and unity of the cosmos prevents us from developing ethical theories which can claim ultimate compliance. We find ourselves in a reality whose meaning transcends us at the limits of time and history. If we look to our historical beginnings or end we find mystery.

This concept of divine creation also underscores the fundamental relativity of human existence. This relativity is the second ethical implication of the concept of creation. The recognition of reality as divine creation not only sets barriers to meaning, but also to human fulfilment within that meaning. Again, the beginning and end of time stand as limits to human endeavour. This relativizes the ethical endeavour of human life in history by pointing to the meaning and fulfilment which exists beyond it.

> Whether dealing with the Alpha or the Omega of history, with the beginning or with the end, the Christian faith prevents provisional meanings, judgements, and fulfilments from becoming ultimate by its sense of a final mystery of divine fulfilment beyond all provisional meanings.[3]

In this way we see the historical expression of the Niebuhrian dialectic in the concept of creation. The recognition of reality as creation identifies the history of human beings as partial and relative, and at the same time identifies it as standing within a

universal history over which God is sovereign. In this dialectic God is not to be identified with creation, but neither is God absent from it. The dialectic of transcendence and immanence is held in tension at the horizons of history. In this manner we are given the ethical context for human endeavour. This is a context of historical relativity and finiteness which looks beyond itself for justification of ethical life.

This brings us to consider the second reference point of a theological ethic. This is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is in Jesus of Nazareth that the transcendent, trans-historical meaning and fulfilment of history is revealed and accomplished in history.

> The affirmation that Christ is the end of history signifies that in his life, death, and resurrection the meaning of man's historic existence is fulfilled. The divine sovereignty, which gives it meaning, is revealed to have an ultimate resource of mercy and forgiveness, beyond judgement, which completes history despite the continued fragmentary and contradictory character of all historic reality.[4]

Niebuhr understands that Christ is the revelation of the *telos* of history. In Jesus Christ is revealed the meaning of historical existence in which self-giving love is the coherence and unity of reality. In the Cross of this Jesus, we are confronted with God's love and with our failure to love. In this confrontation we experience the judgement and mercy of God in our inability to love without self-regard. But in this same Cross we know that God's mercy and love fulfils the love we lack. In this way the Cross stands as a symbol of our historic failure to fulfil history as harmony of life with life, and at the same time indicates God's intention to fulfil that same history by his own intervention.

This revelation of God's 'end' or *telos* for history has two immediate ethical consequences. The first of these results from the consciousness of forgiveness which results from the judgement and mercy experienced in the Cross. This sense of forgiveness results in the ethical expression of tolerance toward the failures and limitations of

others. In this sense the Cross is the symbol of our equality in sin and compels us to treat others as we have been treated.

The second ethical consequence results from this same insight. The Cross declares our sin and presents us with an ethical ideal of love which occurs in history only to be rejected and destroyed. In the crucifixion is revealed the impossibility of self-giving love as a simple historical goal. Niebuhr understands this to be a rejection of any theory of 'progress' in terms of human ability to love and achieve a pure harmony of life with life. The Cross is the verification of the self-contradiction within human beings which will remain till the end of history. Niebuhr understands that growth in reason, or progressively better social systems, will never remove this basic impulse in humanity to self-regard and will-to-power. He recognizes the biblical symbol of the antichrist to represent this fact of history. The symbol of the antichrist is the assertion that growth in love or justice also means growth for potential evil. For Niebuhr the dialectic between self-regard and self-giving will always be present until the end of history. For him there can be no utopia of harmony of life with life within the reach of human endeavour.

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ reveals more than the *telos* of history, it also indicates its *finis*. Niebuhr understands that Christ reveals the 'end' or *telos* in a historical event whereby the coherence and unity of reality is revealed. But this *telos* is not a historic dynamic which can be perceived in the movements of history. The *telos* of life and history is trans-historical and is revealed as a hidden or obscured coherence. While the revelation of this *telos* indicates the nature of human fulfilment, this fulfilment is not completed in history. For this reason Christ and the Cross indicate a future 'end' or *finis* beyond which the harmony of life with life will be accomplished. In this sense the Cross is the nexus between creation and consummation. It reveals the nature of our historical being and declares a future divine event in which our historical life finds fulfilment.

It is this eschatological *finis* which is the third theological reference for an ethic of Niebuhrian realism. This *finis* indicates that the fulfilment of history is not in history, but at its end. As

long as there is history there will be ambiguities and contradictions indicative of human existence. Therefore human life looks to completion beyond history.

> There are provisional meanings in history, capable of being recognized and fulfilled by individuals and cultures; but mankind will continue 'to see through a glass darkly' and the final meaning can only be anticipated by faith. It awaits a completion when 'we shall know even as we are known'. There are provisional judgements upon evil in history; but all of them are imperfect, since the executors of judgement are tainted in both their discernments and their actions by the evil which they seek to over come. History therefore awaits an ultimate judgement. There are renewals of life in history, individually and collectively; but no rebirth lifts life above the contradictions of man's historic existence. The Christian awaits a 'general resurrection' as well as a 'last judgement'.[5]

This *finis* is not to be understood as a rejection of current human history. But rather as its transformation. "Christian eschatology looks forward to an 'end' of history in which the conditions of nature-history are transfigured but not annulled."[6] This understanding of the end of history is expressed in the symbols of the 'general resurrection' and the 'last judgement'. These theological symbols indicate a basic continuity between current history and the consummation of history. Here again we perceive the Niebuhrian dialectic. The consummation of history, in which life realizes the harmony of life with life under the sovereignty of God, is not a possibility in human history. And yet it is this harmony of life with life which is the coherence and unity of current history. Therefore the realization of this law of love at the end of history is not alien to current historical life. It is in fact anticipated in history by divine revelation and human social endeavour.

It is beyond this eschatological *finis* of history, that we find the resolution of the dialectic of anthropological realism and religious idealism. Niebuhr understands that as long as there is human history there will be the tension of this dialectic. Only by the intervention of God in which history is terminated and transformed can this tension be resolved. It is this divine intention which is revealed in Christ to be the *telos* of history and which will be

fulfilled beyond its *finis*. In Christ this intention and fulfilment is identified as the 'Kingdom of God'.

The Kingdom of God is the theological symbol which illustrates God's intention and fulfilment of history. In the Kingdom of God we obtain a vision of a world in which life exists with life in harmony under the sovereignty of God. In this Kingdom of God the contradictions and frustrations of human life have been removed. In this Kingdom human beings express self-giving love and achieve the purest form of justice.

It is this theological symbol which is the primary reference for an ethics of justice. The Kingdom of God is not a human possibility, but reveals the ideal toward which human endeavour must proceed. "The Kingdom of God is relevant to every moment of history as an ideal possibility and as a principle of judgement upon present realities".[7] This Kingdom of God is revealed in Jesus Christ and indicated as a future event beyond the end of history. This places ethical action in an 'interim' between the revelation of God's intention in Christ, and the fulfilment of that intention at the end of time.

> The full implication of the double idea that the 'Kingdom of God has come' and that it is 'coming' is that history is an interim. ... In thus conceiving history after Christ as an interim between disclosure of its true meaning and the fulfilment of that meaning, between the revelation of divine sovereignty and the full establishment of that sovereignty, a continued element of inner contradiction is history is accepted as its perennial characteristic. Sin is overcome in principle but not in fact. Love must continue to be suffering love rather than triumphant love.[8]

In this way we perceive the ethical significance of the Kingdom of God. It is identified in Jesus Christ as the ideal of human social relationships under the sovereignty of God. In this regard it is a goal toward which all social creativity aims. And yet it is not a historical possibility.

> The Kingdom of God is always at hand in the sense that impossibilities are really possible, and lead to new actualities in given moments of history. Nevertheless every actuality of history reveals itself, after the event, as only an approximation of the ideal; and the Kingdom of God is therefore not here. It is in fact always coming but never here.[9]

It is in the concept of the Kingdom of God that we find the historical counterpart to the transcendent ideal of self-giving love. It is these two ideals which are the primary references for a theological ethic. In fact, they are a single idea. The Kingdom of God is nothing more than the ideal of self-giving love portrayed in social-historical terms. As with the ideal of self-giving love, the Kingdom of God is both relevant to present life and yet is ultimately beyond the possibilities of human existence. As with self-giving love, the Kingdom of God is an 'impossible possibility' which has its realization only in the realm of the divine.

In this ethic of Niebuhrian realism, the transcendent and trans-historical ideals find approximate realization within the relativities of history. The expression of these ideals is always limited by anthropological realism. Humans will appropriate these ideals within their social context and in continuity with their particular historical experience. This means that an ethic of justice finds as many different expressions as there are social groups. In this relative and parochial context the values of justice; community, freedom, equality, and order; will be held in a variety of hierarchies of importance. This will result in justice taking shape in a number of forms.

For Niebuhr this means that an ethic of justice must be pragmatic and progressive. It must be pragmatic in that it seeks to find optimal expression within a historical-social context. Within this context justice must seek those structures and systems which will successfully approximate the norm of love and the Kingdom of God. Because of the variety of social experience and parochial history, there can be no 'ideal' structure or system. Systems and structures must be judged within the limitations of historical existence according to their ability to produce justice. Because the ideals of justice are necessarily transcendent and trans-historical, the ethics of social justice executed in the context of historical relativity must be flexible and pragmatic.

Niebuhr also understands that an ethic of social justice must be progressive. This is not to be confused with the concept of progress wherein society evolves to achieve an optimal justice or even utopia.

It is rather the recognition that forms of justice can never be static. Justice is applied in a living social situation which is continually changing. This means that systems and structures of justice must be forever reforming to approximate the ideals of justice in continually new situations. Niebuhr recognizes that when forms of justice seek permanency, they result in becoming the source of injustice in the new social context.

This recognition of relativity does not mean that Niebuhr accepts all systems and structures of justice. Systems and structures of justice are validated by their result in greater approximations to the ideals of justice. It is obvious to Niebuhr that some systems and structures are more successful than others. It is to this concern that we now turn as we examine the artifacts of justice.

Artifacts of justice

Within an ethic of progressive and pragmatic justice the implementation of justice depends on the construction of social artifacts. These artifacts are the structures and systems of a society which maintain and promote the greatest approximation of harmony of life with life under the ideals and values of justice. The first artifacts to be examined will be those of law, politics, and economics. The last artifact to be considered will be that of world community. Law, politics, and economics are basically the artifacts of national communities. But these artifacts also are related to the developing phenomenon of world community and will be also considered in that context.

Law

Niebuhr concerns himself with two expressions of law. One form of law serves distributive justice and the other serves corrective or penal justice. Law as distributive justice is concerned to ensure that the values of justice are preserved within the complexities of social human relationships. This form of law serves to guide and limit behaviour in society. Corrective justice is directly related to

distributive justice and must deal with its violation. We will examine both these forms of law in detail.

Law as distributive justice seeks to approximate the norm of self-giving love by establishing rules and principles which embody the values of social justice; community, freedom, equality, and order. In this way law seeks to be a form of love.

> The law seeks for a tolerable harmony of life with life, sin presupposed. It is, therefore, an approximation of the law of love on the one hand and an instrument of love on the other hand.[10]

But law can never be more than an approximation. For the norm of love transcends the calculative and prescriptive expressions of law corresponding to the transcendent freedom of human beings. In this way the possible social expressions of love cannot be restrained to the simple boundaries of law.

> ...beyond and above every human relation as ordered by a fixed structure of justice, by custom, tradition, and legal enactment, there remain indeterminate possibilities of love in the individual and personal encounters of those who are in the structure.[11]

Niebuhr understands that there is a 'push' and 'pull' to the role of law. As a prescriptive statement the law details our duty to one another in social life. By this moral 'push' the law seeks to approximate the norm of love. But at the same time Niebuhr recognizes that the norm of self-giving love can not be commanded as moral duty. Love cannot be coerced by a rational sense of obligation. Obedience to law must therefore also result from the 'pull' of grace. Because we have received love, we are enabled to give love.

In this manner we see that law is always an approximation to the norm of love and therefore always a relative expression. But law is also relative from the perspective of history and society. From the perspective of history, law is seen to be contingent according to time and place.

> ... a culture which has learned to scan the vast varieties of social and cultural configurations in history is not certain that any law is adequate for all occasions. It is the more sceptical because it has learned to discount the pretensions of universality

> and eternal validity which have been made for various structures and norms of ethics in various cultures. It has learned, in short, that the so-called 'self-evident' truths in the sphere of morality usually cease to be self-evident under new historical circumstances and in new occasions.[12]

This historical relativity finds expression around two concerns. The first concern is that of social relativity. Niebuhr understands that law invariably represents the interests of a particular group in society. Despite the fact that a society seeks inclusiveness in law, it will always be partial and reflect the values and interests of dominant groups. The second concern of relativity is reason.

> There is no universal reason in history, and no impartial perspective upon the whole field of vital interests, which compete with and mutualy support each other. Even the comparatively impartial view of the whole of a society, as expressed particularly in the carefully guarded objectivity of its juridical institutions, participates in the contingent character of all human viewpoints.[13]

While it is recognized that historical relativity is a basic limitation concerning law, it must also be recognized that it is this same historical relativity which gives law its validity. "The 'positive law' of historic communities gains its force primarily from its specificity".[14] The effectiveness of law does not correspond to the purity of its abstract conception, but rather to its relevance to the social vitalities of a particular culture and time.

> Rules of justice do not follow in a 'necessary manner' from some basic proposition of justice. They are the fruit of a rational survey of the whole field of human interests, of the structure of human life and the causal sequences in human relations.[15]

From this perspective it is seen that law is the result of both the abstract values of justice and the social and cultural vitalities of history.

> Usually the norms of law are compromises between the rational-moral ideals of what ought to be, and the possibilities of the situation as determined by given equilibria of vital forces. The specific legal enactments are, on the one hand, the instruments of the conscience of the community, seeking to subdue the potential anarchy of forces and interests into a tolerable harmony. They

> are, on the other hand, merely explicit formulations of given tensions and equilibria of life and power, as worked out by the unconscious interactions of social life.'[16]

For these reasons law is to be understood as the result of a social process in which various perspectives have been synthesized into more and more inclusive forms of justice. Under the norm and values of justice, groups within a society enter into a process of pressure and counter-pressure until a consensus is reached which reflects the concerns and interests of the majority of society. In this way law is the expression of transcendent values appropriated to the relativities of a particular society. As we have seen, this is both the weakness and the strength of law. Law is weak in the sense that it is relative and not absolute or universal. In this manner law is never a static force but an artifact which must be continually reassessed and reformulated. But law also has strength because of this same relativity. This relativity allows it to have a specificity which is necessary if it is to be functional.

Given the inherent relativity of law, Niebuhr understands that a successful form of law is one which is flexible in its constitution and negative in its statement. The law must be flexible for reasons already examined above. Cultural relativity and the human indeterminate potential of love necessitate a form of law which is flexible and amenable to change. Niebuhr recognizes this as a priority in the rapidly changing circumstances of modern technical society.

For similar reasons the law is stated in negative terms. The law cannot coerce people to love and have a moral disposition towards others. At best it approximates the norm of love by setting the limits to human behaviour. In this way the law is stated in negative terms and yet is open and optimistic. It states what we can not do but leaves open the indeterminate possibilities of love.

> ... law, however conceived, accepts and regulates self-interest and prohibits only the most excessive forms of it. It does not command that we love the neighbour but only that we do not take his life or property. It does not command that we seek our neighbour's good but that we respect his rights. Broadly speaking, the end of the law is justice.'[17]

Niebuhr understands that the form of the law that serves corrective or penal justice also stands under a transcendent 'impossible possibility'. As distributive justice stands under the norm of self-giving love, corrective justice stands under the corresponding ideal of forgiveness. "...imaginative justice moves in the direction of forgiveness, or at least to remedial rather than punitive justice".[18] As with distributive justice, corrective justice also exists in a context of relativity. Here law seeks to correct the violation of justice. But this corrective activity is not done in a social vacuum. As much as corrective justice seeks objectivity it can not avoid the impulses of vengeance which it seeks to mitigate.

> An element of vindictive passion will probably corrupt the corrective justice of even the best society. The collective behaviour is not imaginative enough to assure more than minimal approximations of the ideal. Genuine forgiveness of the enemy requires a contrite recognition of the sinfulness of the self and of the mutual responsibility for the sin of the accused. Such spiritual penetration is beyond the capacities of collective man. It is the achievement of only rare individuals. Yet the right to such understanding is involved in the most basic of human rights and follows logically if the basic right to life is rationally elaborated. Thus all standards of corrective justice are organically related to primitive vengeance on the one hand, and the ideal of forgiving love on the other.[19]

The above statement also identifies a second point of relativity affecting corrective justice. This is the insight that a society rarely perceives its own responsibility for the violations of justice which it seeks to correct by punitive law.

Before we move to consider the other structures and systems of justice, it is important to indicate the relationship between law and the other artifacts. Law is fundamentally different from the artifacts of politics and economics. Niebuhr understands that law, more than any other artifact, is a product of rational abstraction. For this reason law is able to more closely approximate the norm of self-giving love. Politics and economics, on the other hand, are more the result of historical vitalities than of reason. This means that these artifacts are more historically contingent and relative and less an approximation to the ideal. But the difference between law and politics and

economics must be seen as difference in degree rather than in kind. Law is organically related to the other artifacts of justice and is disfunctional without them.

> The harmony of communities is not simply attained by the authority of law. *Nomos* does not coerce the vitalities of life into order. The social harmony of living communities is achieved by an interaction between the normative conceptions of morality and law and the existing and developing forces and vitalities of the community.[20]

Politics

Politics is the artifact of social order which is built upon the foundation of organic community with the aim of implementing the values of freedom and equality in social life. It is the task of politics to regulate and maintain the quality of social interaction as a community becomes more complex and extended.

> The conscious contrivances of statecraft ... seek to prevent partial and parochial interests from clashing in chaotic competition or conflict, ... provide channels for the maximum degree of cooperation, ... suppress undue recalcitrance against minimal standards of justice and order, ... equalize fortuitous inequalities in the interest of justice, and ... create a larger community than is possible upon the basis of the 'natural' limits of human sympathy and concern for the neighbour.[21]

In this way it is the role of politics to provide a structure of order which will stabilize the life of the community. This is accomplished with the introduction of power. Political power is a necessity if political structures are to function. This political power "...rests upon the ability to use and manipulate other forms of social power for the particular purpose of organizing and dominating the community".[22] This power found in political order exists between two dialectical foci. "These two elements of communal life - the central organizing principle and power, and the equilibrium of power - are essential and perennial aspects of community organization;...".[23] The organization of power and the equilibrium of power are both necessary for justice in social order. And at the same time they can be the sources for injustice and the destruction of social life. They

exist in tension with one another and yet they can not exist without the other. It is this dialectic of power which is the life and breath of political justice.

Niebuhr understands that power is the continual potential source of injustice in social life. "If men are inclined to deal unjustly with their fellows, the possession of power aggravates this inclination".[24] For Niebuhr, injustice is directly related to excessive power acquired by any individual or group. For this reason the means to ensure the continuance of justice is through the equilibrium of power. By balancing power against power the inordinate accumulation of power is avoided and a tenuous justice is achieved.

> A healthy society must seek to achieve the greatest possible equilibrium of power, the greatest possible number of centres of power, the greatest possible social check upon the administration of power, and the most effective use of forms of coercion in which consent and coercion are compounded.[25]

By balancing the powers of social life, domination by any one group or individual is avoided and justice maintained. But this same principle of justice can also be a source of destruction of social life. The principle of equilibrium of power can be a principle of anarchy and destructive conflict. It is for this reason that the principle of equilibrium of power must exist in a relationship of dialectical necessity with the principle of organization of power. It is the organization of power which restrains the potential anarchy of the balance of power.

> ...historic contests of power must be managed, supervised, and suppressed by the community, precisely because they do not move within the limits of 'nature'. The battleground is the human community and not the animal herd; and the contestants are armed with powers which have been drawn from the historic and communal process.[26]

The organization of power is achieved by means of government or central authority which utilizes two sources of power.

> ...forms of restraint do of course presuppose a central authority, which manages the whole competitive and co-operative enterprise. It has this authority by reason of possession of both prestige and force.[27]

Prestige or 'majesty' is the power to obtain uncoerced consent to govern and utilize other forms of power. This prestige is founded upon social and historical sources. Prestige or 'majesty' gains authority from social consent corresponding to the perceived justice of the political system. The success of justice in a political system encourages trust in the system. This prestige of authority is effective even during temporary periods of injustice if it is believed that the long term result of the political system will be greater justice.

Prestige is also the result of historical processes. A particular form of government has a history in a culture which encourages consent on the basis of custom and habit. Niebuhr understands that custom and habit are strong sources of prestige for government.

> Efforts to create ... an authority by purely constitutional means must confront the fact that the prestige of authority is necessarily the product of historical forms of community, which legal and constitutional means can perfect and redirect, but which they cannot create out of whole cloth.[28]

The second power of centralized authority is that of 'dominion' or force. This power is that of coercion expressed through police and military. This 'dominion' is given to government by consent of the governed in order that internal harmony may be maintained.

> The internal peace of a community is always partly coercive because men are not good enough to do what should be done for the commonweal on a purely voluntary basis. There are both organic and moral forces of inner cohesion; but they are not sufficient to obviate the necessity of coercion.[29]

While this organization of power works for order and justice, it is also the source of injustice. The centralization of power necessarily creates a hierarchy of authority and privilege. Niebuhr understands that this hierarchy is necessary for the exercise of authority. But while this hierarchy is a functional necessity, it also creates the basis for inequality of privilege. Another result of this centralization of power is that it tends to create an oligarchy. At the top of this hierarchy of authority is inevitably a social group

which pursues its own interest by the use of political power. Niebuhr perceives no simple way to resolve this problem of political hierarchy and oligarchy. For these reasons government is both a force for justice as well as injustice.

Because of this tendency to injustice, the principle of organization of power must be limited by the principle of equilibrium of power. Centralized authority must be subject to the balance of power which limits inordinate political domination. Without this limit on centralized authority the society is in danger of the injustice of tyranny.

As with the artifact of law, political structures are subject to the relativities of human limitation and historical contingency. Political structures are especially subject to historical relativity because they are the product of a historical process.

> History is ... not a realm of indeterminate growth and development. It is a realm of conflict. In this conflict new forces and forms of life challenge the established powers and orders. They are a reminder to the established forms and powers of the contingent character of all historical configurations; and a judgement upon the pretension which denies this contingency.[30]

For this reason political structures are subject to reassessment and reformulation in the same manner as the artifact of law. They are to be understood as limited approximations to the Kingdom of God and the harmony of life with life. As contingent and particular structures of a specific time and culture, the political artifacts of social life are always in need of greater and greater approximation to the impossible ideal.

Niebuhr identifies democracy as the form of political structure which is most successful within the limitations and possibilities of political justice. He understands democracy to correspond to anthropological realism. "Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary".[31] Niebuhr understands democracy to provide a free society in which human beings can realize their transcendent possibilities and at the same time provide the balances of power which will restrict the destructive human self-regard and will-to-power.

> Democracy does indeed require some confidence in man's natural capacity for justice. But its institutions can be more easily justified as bulwarks against injustice. Indeed it is because democracy holds every public power under public scrutiny and challenges every pretension of wisdom, and balances every force with a countervailing force, that some of the injustices which characterize traditional societies, and modern tyrannies, are prevented.[32]

Niebuhr also understands that the prestige and dominion of central authority is qualified within a democratic system. In a democracy, prestige and dominion are directly dependent on the community due to the distribution of power through universal suffrage. The prestige and dominion of the government is the prestige and dominion of the community itself. In this way the rule by oligarchy is qualified and the hierarchy of authority placed under constant review and subject to reform.

It is this political flexibility which makes democracy successful. As new forces and forms of life appear in history, a democratic system is able to adjust and restructure. By means of explicit consent to govern, provided by society through suffrage, and the flexibility of political structure, which allows the alternation of particular governments and the reform of structures, democracy provides the best known approximation to the ideal of a just society within the limitations and possibilities of anthropological realism.

Economics

Economics is a social artifact which is also a form of power and subject to the dialectic of power. In economics we find the same tension between a centralization of power and the equilibrium of power. As with political power, economic power meets the requirements of justice when it is widely distributed.

> Since economic power, as every other form of social power, is a defensive force when possessed in moderation and a temptation to injustice when it is great enough to give the agent power over others, it would seem that its widest and most equitable distribution would make for the highest degree of justice.[33]

Unfortunately this distribution is difficult to achieve. The equilibrium of economic power, held in harmonious tension, is not a natural occurrence. From this perspective Niebuhr rejects the optimism of *laissez-faire* or free economic theory. He understands that human freedom transcends any 'natural' balances of economic life. There is no 'natural law' which will restrain the human will-to-power and self-regard in economic relationships. "If the economic process is left severely alone either the strong devour the weak, in which case monopoly displaces competition, or competition breeds chaos in the community".[34]

This problem of distribution and equilibrium is compounded by the fact that centralization of power is inherent in the economic process. Niebuhr understands this to be particularly true in a technological society. He perceives in modern technical civilization a historical process wherein centralization of economic power moves toward greater efficiency and has social value. But at the same time this centralization of economic power provides the basis for injustice. For this reason the issue of centralization and equilibrium of economic power become ethically ambiguous.

> The tendency toward monopoly is obviously a concomitant of the general increase of interdependence in communal relations in a technical society. In so far as the unification of technical process is a service to the community (despite the perils of centralization of power which inhere in it), the effort to destroy the unification in order to avoid its concomitant perils, would seem as unwise and futile as the analogous effort of peasants of a previous age to prevent the use of machinery upon the land. The community must find a way of dealing with the problem of centralized power without destroying the unity and efficiency of the process.[35]

One solution to this centralization of economic power is its socialization. Niebuhr rejects the Marxist extreme of socialization. The Marxist form of socialization places too much power in the hands of the managers of economic life and compounds economic and political power. This form of socialization leaves society open to tyranny.

But Niebuhr does not reject the need for regulation or order. The centralization of economic power and the distribution of economic power need to be placed under political control. The problem is one of how

the social values of equality and freedom are to be applied to economics. How much freedom is allowed for economics to create centres of power and how much regulation is needed to ensure some level of equality? This problem becomes increasingly difficult within the context of social life which functions under a hierarchy of authority and privilege. This hierarchy of authority encourages inequalities in economic power.

For Niebuhr there is no easy answer or 'ideal' solution to this problem of economic freedom and economic regulation. He understands that the issue of equality is one which remains ambiguous in social life due to the very structures of society.

> ... there are naturally no possibilities of arriving at explicit agreements in any society about the degree of inequality which is necessary for the proper performance of different functions or for maintenance of social incentives, or how much equality is necessary to meet the requirements of justice.[36]

For this reason Niebuhr contends that social solutions to the problem of economic justice must be proximate, contextual and continually revised.

This pragmatic approach to economics functions best within the political structure of democracy; "... democracy is a method of finding proximate solutions for insoluble problems".[37] Within democracy, economic freedom and economic regulation are determined by political power held by society. By means of universal suffrage, democracy provides a regulative force over the potential inequalities of economic power.

Within this political context two forms of economic life are to be further examined: property and the market economy. Niebuhr understands that property, like social hierarchy, is an ambiguous necessity of social life. Property is a source of justice in that its possession is a safeguard against the tendency of people to take advantage of one another. In this sense property is a source of security. But property, like social hierarchy, is also the source for injustice. Property is a form of power which can be used for domination of others within society.

There is no clear distinction between the various forms and uses of property. Property can be a source of power over others, a source of security, and a necessary aspect of social function. And it can be all of these at the same time. There is also no clear measure of social value for assessing the quantity of property held and the corresponding economic power. For this reason the problem of property can not be solved by an abstract principle, but only in the context of a democratic process. "There must ... be a continuous debate on the property question in democratic society and a continuous adjustment to new developments".[38]

Within this context Niebuhr understands that society may choose to socialize some forms of property. He presents this option with some reservation.

> Since there are no forms of the socialization of property which do not contain some peril of compounding economic and political power, a wise community will walk warily and test the effect of each new adventure before further adventures.[39]

The socialization he presents as a solution to some social problems of property is one informed by pragmatic concerns. The socialization of property must promote justice in society and avoid the compounding of political and economic power. He does not know if this is possible, but suggests that the democratic process might help in placing a check upon the managers of socialized economic property.

The second concern of economic justice within a democratic political structure is that of the market economy. The market economy is the functional expression of the tension between economic freedom and economic regulation. This economic system consists of a harmony of interests held in equilibrium. This equilibrium is not the result of human goodwill, but rather a balance of economic power.

> A harmony of a market economy is, in any event, not a harmony created by mutual forbearance and consideration. It is a harmony of special interests held in equilibrium. It is tolerable if the interests are armed with fairly equal power; but the situation can become intolerable if the disproportions of power are too great.[40]

As already noted above, this balance of economic power cannot exist without a centralized authority which maintains the potential chaos within a structure of order.

Niebuhr understands that the most successful form of economic justice is one which takes advantage of a market economy regulated by a democratic political structure. In this construction of economic and political justice, the society takes advantage of the vitality of the market system, yet regulates its inherent inequalities under the political equality of democracy. The primary means of mitigating the inequalities of the market system is through the political right of equality of opportunity. This social system is identified by Niebuhr as a 'welfare state'. For him, this is the best possible political and economic approximation to justice.

> Healthy free societies ... have used broadly based political power (universal suffrage) to equalize the inequalities of economic power, to establish minimal standards of security and justice, and to assure the community some services which the market does not find it profitable to supply. These are the general and minimal accomplishments of the 'welfare state' which develop in healthy nations, whether their original orientation was 'capitalistic' or 'socialistic'.[41]

World community

Global justice utilizes these same artifacts of social justice; law, politics and economics; but finds that the artifacts which make for world community and justice are weakened by the lack of organic community. As examined in previous chapters, systems and structures of justice must be built upon the organic fabric of community. This common fabric is lacking in international relations. But despite this limitation, Niebuhr understands organic community is being extended by human artifact. The artifact of modern technical civilization is creating extensions of organic community. This community is being created by two technical phenomena. The first force of cohesion and mutuality is that of universality created by the interdependence of nations due to technological civilization.

> ... technical civilization, developed during the past century, introduced a new force of universality into history. Its

> instruments of production, transport and communication reduced the space-time dimensions of the world to a fraction of their previous size and led to a phenomenal increase in the interdependence of all national communities. This new technical interdependence created a potential world community because it established complex interrelations which could be ordered only by a wider community than now exists.[42]

The second cohesive technical phenomenon is that of the threat of nuclear annihilation. This is certainly a negative force of cohesion, but it is a force for community. "...the recognition by both sides of being involved in the common fate of the nuclear dilemma may create the first strands of community which could be enlarged by various forms of mutuality".[43]

While modern technical civilization provides some forces of cohesion and community, it also develops and creates power which serves the egoism of nations. In this regard, the world community is subject to the dialectic of power. But in this global community there is no central authority which provides order to regulate the power of nations. For this reason the world community is one of an anarchy of nations restrained by a balance of power. This balance of power is not the harmony of the equilibrium of power. In the global setting some nations have great power while others have little. It is these great nations which exist in a tentative balance of power. Niebuhr identifies this precarious balance as one of 'terror' caused by the potential of nuclear annihilation.

> ...a precarious nuclear peace, based on a 'balance of terror', has been established in the world because the novel dimension of destructive capacity in nuclear weapons creates an identity between mutual interest and self-interest in the two contestents.[44]

In this way the centres of power in the global community are restricted from using coercion to dominate and enforce their vision of unity on the world.

Within this context of potential community and potential conflict, the artifacts of justice have significance. Although limited by current lack of organic community, their utility directly corresponds to the indeterminate growth of community. The artifact of law cannot

create community, but it can be helpful in guiding the growth of community. In like manner, the artifact of politics is dependent on community for its prestige and dominion. At present this world community does not exist. Yet a limited political artifact can be helpful in the growth toward world community. Niebuhr identifies the United Nations as one such limited artifact which has value in this regard. It is limited in terms of power, yet it serves as a forum and foundation for the development of principles and law and the political structuring of a world community.

The strongest cohesive artifact of world community is that of economics. The growth in economics corresponds directly to the growth of technical civilization. "Most important as a force of social cohesion in the world community is the increasing economic interdependence of peoples of the world".[45] This artifact of economics is the strongest force for community in the world and it is also a primary source of injustice. While economics allows us to affirm the mutuality of dependence, it also is a source of power for the egoism of nations. Economic power is expressed in an international hierarchy with the greatest power held by the central powers of the great nations. Until there is some form of world order and justice, economics will continue to be a force of unity as well as a source of injustice.

For Niebuhr, world community must be built between hope and fear. It is a task which requires the realism to perceive the limitations and the possibilities of all human endeavour. One point of realism is that human beings will never construct world community on the basis of mutual love and self-giving, but rather in combination with human self-interest.

> The world community must be built by men and nations sufficiently mature and robust to understand that political justice is achieved, not merely by destroying, but also by deflecting, beguiling and harnessing residual self-interest and by finding the greatest possible concurrence between self-interest and the general welfare.[46]

A second point of realism is that human beings cannot escape the conflict of groups and nations caused by differences of social and

historical particularity. This makes any 'ideal' construction of world community an impossibility.

> The task of building a world community is man's final necessity and possibility, but also his final impossibility. It is a necessity and possibility because history is a process which extends the freedom of man over natural process to the point where universality is reached. It is an impossibility because man is, despite his increasing freedom, a finite creature, wedded to time and place and incapable of building any structure of culture or civilization which does not have its foundations in a particular and dated locus.[47]

As with all other artifacts of justice, world community is also an approximation to the harmony of life with life required by the norm of love. And like all artifacts of justice, it is a limited and relative human expression contingent to time and place and in need of continual reassessment and reformulation.

NOTES

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4. CRITIQUE AND COMMENT ON THE NIEBUHRIAN THEOLOGY OF JUSTICE

Niebuhr's theology has attracted criticism and comment for a period spanning some fifty years. Paul Tillich[1] was one of his first dialogue partners and criticism continues to come from contemporary theologians such as Judith Vaughan[2]. It is not the intention of this chapter to cover the wide spectrum of criticism and comment related to Niebuhr's theology. But rather, the focus will remain on issues relating directly to his theology of justice.

Two distinct areas of criticism will be avoided. The first relates to Niebuhr's polemic style of writing. This form of theological writing attracted a great deal of criticism and most of this criticism was itself polemic in style. This type of comment is not helpful in the critical task of assessing Niebuhr's work because it abstracts Niebuhr's theology to one or more focal points and ignores the complexity of his dialectical method. It will be the intention of this critique to assess his theology of justice within its dialectical complexity.

A second area of comment which will not be within the critical concern of this chapter is that of Niebuhr's personal practice of this theology in his social and political context. This study will be restricted to examining Niebuhr's theology and ethics as theory and method and will avoid discussion of his personal implementation of his theology. Of course, it must be stated that he developed his theology and ethics in direct relation to his social and political practice. Niebuhr's theological and ethical process was always a movement from ethical practice to theological reflection. It was his engagement in specific social, economic and political issues that led him to rethink and reformulate theological and ethical theory and method. The flexibility of this theological and ethical process is reflected in the other theologians who embraced his 'christian realism' yet did not necessarily follow his implementation in social practice. In this

regard Niebuhr's theology can be described as 'open' concerning actual decision making and action in political settings. For this reason it is possible to assess his theology and ethics without necessarily entering into criticism or defence of how he implemented his thought in his particular historical context. The relation between theory and practice will become clearer during assessment of his dialectical theology and pragmatic ethics.

The following critique of Niebuhr's theology of justice will be concerned with his theology and ethics in relation to the ongoing process of social justice. It will not be concerned with application of his theology to any particular historical social setting, but rather, it will assess how his theology and ethics provide a general theory or method which can be applied to social settings.

The intent of this chapter is to examine the strengths and weaknesses of Niebuhr's theology of justice. In particular, the concern will be to examine key themes and elements of his theology and ethics. Prior to examining these various themes and elements it is helpful to assess his theology and ethics as a general theory and method. This will provide the context for our examination of particular themes and elements of Niebuhr's theology of justice.

Dialectical theology

To begin this critique with an assessment of Niebuhr's dialectical theology is somewhat of an arbitrary decision. In some sense this decision moves in opposition to Niebuhr's own method. I would agree with James Gustafson's comment on Niebuhr's theological method; "Theology is more in the service of ethics, I believe than ethics is in the service of theology".[3] As a general description it can indeed be said that Niebuhr's method moves from practice to theory. For this reason his pragmatic ethics is not to be understood as a concern which proceeds from a fully developed theological system, but rather is part of the process of theological reflection. In Niebuhr's theology we find a dialectical interpenetration of theory and practice.

In spite of this dialectical relationship between theology and ethics, I believe it is appropriate to begin our critique by examining

Niebuhr's dialectical theology. His theology has its roots neither in rational theological reflection, nor in pragmatic ethical practice, but in the biblical-dramatic worldview. Niebuhr perceives that the content of this biblical-dramatic worldview illustrates the various dimensions of theological dialectic. In this regard an initial critical observation needs to be made. While Niebuhr finds a dialectical reality in the text of scripture, it is questionable whether the hermeneutical procedure he employs demonstrates this dialectic. This criticism will be pursued when we place his theology in critical comparison with the Liberation theology of Latin America.

It is Niebuhr's understanding of scripture and revelation which provide him with theological themes which are regulative in regard to the development of his theology as well as the practice of his ethics. Niebuhr believes that scripture provides us with symbols and myths which illustrate the divine-human relationship. At the pinnacle of this symbolic and mythic tradition is the cross of Jesus Christ. These symbols and myths are 'true' to the extent that they illuminate human life and history. As Gustafson has commented concerning Niebuhr's understanding of revelation;

> The 'truth' of revelation was not so much a correlation between religious language and the being and acts of God as its power to disclose profound dimensions of human experience. Revelation is heuristic in function and its 'truth' is confirmed by what it unveils about human life.[4]

In this manner we see that pragmatic methodology is already at work in identifying the regulative themes of the biblical tradition. The authority of these themes is not *a priori* founded in a doctrine of inspiration, but rather their authority depends upon their ability to give meaning and direction to human life and history. These themes are also not embraced on the basis of rational analysis. They are embraced by faith and verified in experience.

Gustafson identified three regulative principles in Niebuhr's thought which are derived from the biblical tradition: judgement, mercy, and hope. The principle of judgement indicates an anthropological realism which demonstrates the limits of human life. The principle of mercy illumines God's grace and sacrificial love and

is the impetus to human achievement in life and history. The principle of hope directs us to an ultimate coherence of creation and God's intention for history in the Kingdom of God.[5]

This biblical tradition is also the foundation for Niebuhr's dialectical method. Within scripture he discovers the 'impossible possibility' of love and the Kingdom of God. He finds also the immanence and transcendence of God and human nature defined by nature and spirit. This dialectic of mutual interpenetration and opposition is also subject to pragmatic assessment. For Niebuhr, this dialectic method best corresponds to human history and experience. His dialectic illustrates the different limits of various phenomena without too simply abstracting the phenomena for clarity. His dialectic maintains the ambiguity and tension which is common to human existence.

From symbol and myth embraced by faith and verified in experience, Niebuhr moves to theological reflection. It is at this point that he develops his anthropological realism and love idealism. It is also at this point that he develops his understanding of history with its tension between the ideal and the real. This theology is dominated by his dialectic as well as subject to pragmatic assessment. His 'ideas' are verified by their coherence with other ideas, logic, or empirical experience.

This dialectic and pragmatic method makes Niebuhr's theology integrative, contextual, and dynamic. It is integrative theology in that it follows a pragmatic method which seeks coherence with a larger environment of ideas and experience. This makes Niebuhr's theology open and not exclusive. It is also integrative due to its dialectic structure. Dialectic method prevents theology from embracing a simple coherence. The dialectic method forces theology into dialogue concerning its own areas of tension and ambiguity.

In the same manner, Niebuhr's theology is contextual and relative. Because it follows pragmatic concerns, theology seeks to be relevant to a particular historical situation. The dialectical method also reminds theology of the relative nature of theological reflection and prevents it from the arrogant assumption of providing universal, eternal truths.

Because of the integrative and contextual nature of theology, it is to be understood as a process rather than as a closed system. This

makes Niebuhr's theology dynamic rather than static. Niebuhr follows Augustine's dictum of 'faith seeking understanding' and interprets this as an ongoing process.

The weakness in Niebuhr's theology is his movement from biblical symbol or myth to theological interpretation and application. How he interprets the biblical-dramatic worldview determines the emphases and direction of his theology and ethics. The primary points of criticism regarding this hermeneutical move have to do with divine agency, human potential, and historical possibility. These areas will be commented on in depth under the appropriate theological themes found below. It is these concerns which set the limits to the realization of justice in human life and history in Niebuhr's theology.

Throughout the examination of Niebuhr's theological method we have perceived his pragmatic concern which looks to verification in life and experience. In this way ethics are placed at the centre of Niebuhr's theology. It is to a consideration of his ethics that we now turn.

Pragmatic ethics

As with theology, ethics finds its foundation in the biblical-dramatic worldview. The three regulative principles identified above: judgement, mercy, and hope, are relational and inherently the grounding for ethics. At the focus of this biblical-dramatic worldview is the Cross which provides ethics with its behavioural norm. In the Cross the 'impossible possibility' of sacrifical love is revealed as the overriding moral 'end' for Christian life.

This norm of self-sacrificial love makes Niebuhr's ethics a dispositional ethic. The norm of love does not explicitly provide a detailed description of what expressions of love are possible for human life, but rather serves as an 'impossible possibility' which judges all forms of human love and calls these expressions to greater approximation to self-sacrificial love. This ethical norm indicates a disposition without restricting the possible forms love may take.

While this ethic recognizes a dispositional norm, it is also a consequential ethic because of its pragmatic method. Guided by the norm of love, the ethic seeks to express itself within a particular

social context. It is at this point that we discern the dialectic between love and justice. While love is the transcendent norm of theology, justice is the ethical approximation to love responding to the specific needs and problems of the social context. Niebuhr's pragmatic ethic is not a pure pragmatism which utilizes any method which 'works', but rather seeks a workable method or practice under the judgement and guidance of the norm of sacrificial love.

As can be perceived by the relationship of disposition to consequence, and love to justice, Niebuhr's ethic is thoroughly dialectical. Between the regulative principles of judgement, mercy, and hope, and the concrete decisions of social, economic, and political life, there is the tension and ambiguity which is characteristic of Niebuhrian dialectic. While this ethic seeks to fulfil norms through pragmatic strategy, the dialectic realities found in theology, anthropology, and history, maintain an ambiguity and tension in all ethical response. Therefore, as with theology, ethics must be perceived as integrative and 'open', contextual and relative, and as a dynamic process rather than a series of universally applicable behavioural norms.

At this point we see that theology and ethics stand in a thoroughly dialectical relationship and that separate critique of each may be misleading. Theology provides the interpretation of biblical symbol and myth which looks to experience and practice for verification. This pragmatic method places ethics as the central arena in which theology is justified. On the other hand, ethics is not an independent practice guided solely by concern for consequence, but is guided by regulative themes or principles of theology. In this manner we find theology and ethics in circular relationship of mutual dependence and modification.

Concerning this dialectical relationship, I find myself in agreement with Gustafson concerning the primacy of ethics in Niebuhrian theology. This primacy of ethics has the result of establishing the love-justice dialectic at the centre of theology. For Niebuhr, love is not one theological theme among others, nor is justice one concern of ethics among others. Love and justice become the central concerns of christian existence in light of the drama of the Cross.

In the above we have identified Niebuhr's theology and ethics as having expression in a qualified pragmatic methodology. It can also be recognized that this pragmatic method may provide a serious weakness in his theology and ethics. Roger Shinn identifies this weakness as a tendency to conservatism.

> The paradox of pragmatism is that it is an avowedly progressive philosophy that in the last analysis may be conservative. ...a pragmatic ethic is inherently progressive because it looks not to past authority but to future possibilities, not to precedents but to consequences. Yet, ... pragmatism presupposes a general consensus about society and its goals. In asking its favourite question -- 'what works?' -- pragmatism asks the question within a context. ... The context is usually a functioning social system, in need of improvement, but capable of improvement. The context includes also some kind of consensus on values.[6]

This raises the question of whether Niebuhr's theology provides a sufficient prophetic and visionary foundation to mitigate the conservative tendencies of a pragmatic method. As we examine Niebuhr's theological themes of anthropological realism, Jesus Christ and love idealism, and God and history, we will examine their bearing on his development of a concept of justice.

Anthropological realism

Niebuhr's anthropology is the strongest aspect of his dialectical theology. This is due to his use of historical verification rather than verification by subjective experience or pragmatic utility. Even so, his anthropology reveals a particular bias which has drawn comment from feminist theologians. Theologians Daphne Hampson, Judith Vaughan, Judith Plaskow, and Rosemary Ruether perceive in Niebuhr's theology an anthropology which excludes their experience as women.[7] Their criticism of Niebuhr's theology also includes concerns which will be dealt with under the headings of Jesus Christ and love idealism and God and history. Under this heading we will restrict critique to Niebuhr's understanding of sin in relation to individuality and society.

Reinhold Niebuhr defines sin in terms of pride, which is to be understood as a extension of will-to-live to will-to-power. This pride

occurs in the freedom and imagination of human self-transcendence whereby the human makes claims for the self which extend beyond the limits of human existence. In other words, pride is the human seeking to be God.

Feminist theologians claim that this understanding of sin is partial and a particularly male interpretation. For them, sin as pride corresponds to a male concern for individuality and power hierarchy and neglects the sociality and inter-connectedness of human existence. And most importantly, it ignores the position of those in society who are denied the possibility of self-transcendence. For the oppressed and powerless, sin as pride does not address their situation. Pride is rather the sin of those who possess or aspire to power.

Niebuhr understands that sin as pride also includes sin as sensuality. Niebuhr defines the sin of sensuality as; "... the destruction of harmony within the self, by the self's undue identification with and devotion to particular impulses and desires within the self".[8] This form of sin involves the loss of self in the vitalities of nature or the structures and systems of society. For Niebuhr, sin as sensuality is a form of sin as pride. Plaskow identifies this as a weakness in Niebuhr's understanding of sin. "The flaw in his doctrine of sin lies in the fact that, in subordinating sensuality, he loses sight of it as a significant human sin and one independent of pridefulness".[9]

Feminist theologians suggest a fuller understanding of sin which results in a more thorough dialectic. From their perspective, sin as pride and sin as sensuality stand in dialectical relationship. Pride and sensuality are to be equally understood as expressions of sin. According to this interpretation, sin as sensuality is the acceptance of a diminutive role in life whereby one flees from freedom and does not realize the possibilities of self-transcendence. As Plaskow states;

> The refusal of self-transcendence ought to be, if one uses Niebuhr's categories, no less a sin than pride -- a sin against oneself, against other persons, and against God. If pride is the attempt to usurp the place of God, sensuality is the denial of creation in his image.[10]

Vaughan understands this dialectic of sin to illustrate a relationship to power which creates alienation and the breakdown of community. Pride is the refusal to relinquish power and sensuality is the refusal to claim power. The first form of sin creates a self who perceives itself to be separate from others, the second form of sin creates a self who perceives itself as a mere appendage of others.''

Ruether takes this analysis one step further by asserting that this dialectic of sin leads to different moral obligations. For the person of pride and power, the theoretical moral obligation is to relinquish power. For the oppressed and powerless, the moral obligation is to claim power.'[2] This analysis has implications for the understanding of salvation and of human agency in history and will be addressed below.

This dialectic of sin as pride and sensuality modifies Niebuhr's theology of justice. His understanding of sin as pride serves as a restraint on the ambition and will-to-power of the powerful. In this regard it is helpful to the establishment of justice. But this same understanding of sin could also be used as a restraint on the will-to-live of the oppressed and powerless. In this regard it becomes the basis for injustice. For this reason Niebuhr's theology needs the fuller dialectic provided by sin as pride and sin as sensuality. This dialectic allows for both the restraint of power as well as the appropriating of power. This has the result of mitigating some of the conservative tendencies of Niebuhr's pragmatic method and creating a more radical pragmatism in service of justice.

It is in light of this fuller dialectic of sin that we now turn to the critique of Niebuhr's christology and understanding of love.

Jesus Christ and love idealism

At the centre of Niebuhr's theology and ethic is a love idealism illustrated in the Cross of Jesus Christ. In the following critique we will examine this love idealism and will examine the christology upon which it depends.

The critique of Niebuhr's love idealism focuses on two areas; love as an ethical idealism and perfectionism, and love as mutuality and

sacrifice. The first concern for comment is the love idealism in Niebuhr's theology and ethics. Niebuhr provides us with a love ideal which he calls an 'impossible possibility'. The strength of this perfectionist ideal is that it serves as a source of judgement in relation to human self-regard. It continually reminds the human being that his or her acts of love are always proximate, ambiguous, and in constant need of correction and improvement. The weakness in this ideal is that it may function as a retardant to ethical action because of its negative posture of judgement and status as an 'impossible possibility'. The question to be raised is whether Niebuhr's perfectionist ideal is too abstract and removed from life to be relevant to human experience and practice. This same question will be addressed to his christology.

This criticism is not to be understood as disregarding Niebuhr's insight concerning *agape* or sacrificial love as a norm which judges all human attempts to love. It is rather a question concerning his formulation of this love as a perfectionist ideal. As a perfectionist ideal, Niebuhr's concept of love may be a 'pinnacle' which is far too high to stand in creative dialectic with all proximate forms of love. An understanding of *agape* which exists within the ambiguities and impulses of human existence may be a more helpful norm than a perfectionism. This would mean that *agape* or sacrificial love is never an abstracted disinterested love, but rather an expression of disinterested self-giving in spite of self-regard. This understanding would maintain *agape* as a transcendent norm, but move it towards 'possibility' rather than 'impossibility'.

The second area of critique concerns the dialectical relationship between love as self-sacrifice and love as mutuality. This critique was raised by the Feminist theologians noted above. As they perceive a bias in Niebuhr's understanding of sin, so also they perceive a corresponding bias in his ideal of sacrificial love. From their perspective, love as self-sacrifice addresses the sin of pride but neglects the sin of self-deprivation. For the person under oppression, who experiences life as broken-ness and limitation, the norm of self-sacrifice is heard as a moral directive to accept their restrictive

condition. For Daphne Hampson, love is not normative as self-sacrifice, but rather as mutuality.

> If woman's basic problem is not self-centredness, but rather lack of a sense of self, a scheme of salvation which consists in breaking the self, and in discontinuity with the past, may be unhelpful. The inter-relation of love, with God and with others ... allows one to feel good about oneself. One is affirmed as a self by being loved for oneself, and out of a certain centredness in oneself, loves another.[13]

This insight into the limitation of self-sacrifice as the ultimate expression of love leads to a fuller dialectic between love as self-sacrifice and mutuality. This dialectic would recognize that love consists of self-giving as well as receiving, and that both these dynamics are present in love as mutuality and as sacrifice. In other words, mutuality and sacrifice are two expressions of one love which is realized in the receiving and the giving of love.

Love as mutuality recognizes the inherent sociality of human beings and the love that is realized in this context. It is in the context of intimate community with its 'common grace'[14] and inter-dependence, that human beings receive love and are given the security and strength to love others. It is on this organic level that human beings learn to love. Being loved makes love possible. In this context the norm of love is that of loving the neighbour as one loves one's self. But not all social situations provide a context of 'common grace'. In the situation of oppression and self-deprivation, the norm of loving the neighbour and self becomes a radical ethic of solidarity and social transformation. In this context the love ethic seeks gains in mutuality and social self-realization.

Love as sacrifice is the norm of human transcendent freedom. It is the norm which judges human pride and encourages humility. It is in freedom that human beings embrace the self-giving love of God revealed in the Cross of Jesus Christ. It is the reception of this divine self-giving which makes the response of human sacrificial love possible. In the context of God's love, human beings have the security and strength to be self-giving, even to the ultimate limit of sacrifice of life.

Love as sacrifice and love as mutuality stand in a dialectic of inter-dependence and inter-penetration. Love has its origins in organic community and this community is the foundation upon which love in transcendent freedom is grounded. Life under 'common grace' prepares the human being for life under divine grace. But as Niebuhr rightly observes, love as mutuality also needs love as sacrifice. Self-sacrificial love provides the basis for forgiveness and toleration which is necessary for mutuality to succeed.

As with the dialectic of sin, this dialectic of love provides a broader foundation for ethical optimism within Niebuhr's theology. While it does not affect the structure of his understanding of justice, it does strengthen some of its insights. This fuller dialectic of love reaffirms Niebuhr's insight concerning community as the foundation of justice. The community is given greater emphasis as the context for mutuality and as the ground which serves as the impetus towards justice.

This love idealism in Niebuhr's theology and ethics is founded in his christology. Therefore, I would agree with Paul Lehmann that; "Christology is the key to the understanding and interpretation of his work".[15] There are two primary areas of critique concerning his christology. This critique deals with the relation between the Jesus of the biblical witness and the Christ of 'myth', and the issue of divine agency in the life of Jesus.

The first area of critical concern corresponds to the degree of abstraction found in love idealism. Alan Richardson[16] and Edward John Carnell[17] both perceive Niebuhr to be presenting a christology representing a Christ of Liberalism. In such a representation, it is questionable what relationship this Christ of Liberalism has to do with the Jesus of history. As Carnell states;

> Perhaps the greatest disappointment that one encounters in studying Niebuhr is the regrettable way in which a sharp division is made between *Christ the abstract wisdom of history*, the revelation of the mind of the eternal God for man, and *Jesus the historical person who walked in Jerusalem*. There is not the slightest question but what Niebuhr takes a high view of *agape* as the revelation of the mind of God. As wisdom and truth, Christ is heaven-sent. But on the question of the person of the Jesus of history, Niebuhr fails to pass beyond his erstwhile liberalism.[18]

Niebuhr creates this division by developing a 'Christ myth' which corresponds in abstraction to his love idealism. Carnell is correct when he perceives that this use of myth moves Christ into a non-historical sphere; "A slight suspicion ... easily arises that Niebuhr's concept of 'myth' refers not only to something trans-historical but also to something non-historical".[19] In this christological representation, Niebuhr abstracts the Jesus remembered in the biblical text to a symbolic Christ of the Cross. This Christ of abstracted disinterested love could be seen to have little relation to the Jesus of the socio-political context of first century Palestine. This criticism will become more significant as we examine the christology of Liberation theology.

The second point of critical concern, the agency of God, grows out of this initial point of criticism. Niebuhr not only neglects the socio-political and historical context of Jesus, he also reduces to symbol and myth the elements in the narrative of Jesus' life which indicate a divine presence and agency. The most significant symbolic and mythical reduction is the resurrection of Jesus. Here again, Niebuhr stays within the tradition of Liberalism and reduces the historical Jesus to significance as myth and symbol. This understanding of the resurrection as symbol or myth has a detrimental effect on Niebuhr's theology. It brings into question Niebuhr's conception of God's agency in history and human life. This critical point will be developed further as we comment on Niebuhr's view of history.

In Niebuhr's christology we find a relaxation of his dialectic. In his construction of a myth of disinterested love which serves presuppositions of Liberalism, he has created a dialectic which is one-sided in favour of a trans-historical, if not non-historical, Christ of the Cross. In this dialectic we find missing the interpenetration and dependence of a historical Jesus and a transcendent Christ. Missing from this partial dialectic is the ambiguity and tension that would exist between Jesus as a social being involved in the socio-political realities of his historical context and the Christ who in his individual freedom reveals the *agape* of God by self-giving which

ultimately leads to self-sacrifice. I believe that the richness of Niebuhr's own dialectical method, when fully applied to christology, is a better critical guide to the height and depth of the historical and transcendent significance of Jesus the Christ than the limited 'mythical' method which he has employed. This issue will be pursued further in regard to Liberation theology.

The significance of this critique for Niebuhr's theology of justice is the increased relevancy allowed by a fuller dialectic. As with previous critical concerns, a christology which is more dialectical allows a greater emphasis to be placed on issues of justice within the context of history. This move from the height of exclusive myth ensures that the transcendent Christ is trans-historical rather than non-historical and that the significance of the historical Jesus is found in creative tension between his temporal bound humanity and his transcendence.

The primary critical issue this raises for his theology and ethics of justice is the agency of God in human life and history. The limitations and the possibilities of God's agency is tied to Niebuhr's christology. As Carnell observed; "Niebuhr clearly states that the relation between Jesus and Christ does not differ from the relation between '*all* life and history and the transcendent'".[20] If we understand the dialectic between 'Jesus' and 'Christ' to be more balanced, then we have increased the positive significance of history and God's agency in history. This theological move results in an ethical optimism in Niebuhr's theology of justice. It is to this issue of God's agency in history that our critical concern will now turn.

God and history

I agree with Gustafson when he states that; "For Niebuhr, I believe that the transcendence of God was finally accented more than the immanence".[21] We have seen this emphasis in Niebuhr's love idealism and transcendent christology. If we take this vertical dialectic of divine transcendence and immanence and view it diachronically as a dynamic of history, we find that the same criticism applies. In Niebuhr's understanding of history, the Kingdom of God as history's

fulfilment stands beyond the end of history itself. Once again we are confronted with a dialectic which may be too severe to function as a creative ethical force in the establishment of justice.

One of Niebuhr's later categories for describing history was the term 'irony'. This term was meant to indicate the phenomenon in which historical actions have results different from what was anticipated. 'Irony' indicated the ambiguity and limited nature of all human activity in history. This term can be applied to Niebuhr's theology. Niebuhr developed his theology with the intention that it would serve as a guide to transformation and reform of society in service of justice. In this intention he was optimistic. He claimed that history was filled with indeterminate possibilities and that there were no limits set in history for achievement of a more universal brotherhood. And yet, the irony is that his theology as a whole does not communicate this optimism. By placing the fulfilment of history beyond history in the Kingdom of God, Niebuhr inhibits the ethical impetus for justice in the present. Ruether observed this as the 'reality' of Niebuhr's realism.

> Niebuhrian realism gradually gave way to a complacent satisfaction with minimal expectations that all too easily supported the conservative status quo. When that faith in the impossible possibility of a real kingdom in a real future disappears, faith in man's ability to change his situation fades as well.[22]

Niebuhr provides us with a dialectic of realism which protects us from the delusions and tragedies of an extreme historical optimism. But in developing this dialectic of realism he neglects the imaginative and visionary sources of human hope which look to an improved existence. As Gabriel Fackre observed;

> Critics assert that realism is so preoccupied with balancing power blocks and practising the art of the possible that commitment to the radical social change necessary for our times is never generated. It lacks a passion for openness to the future, for doing the undoable, thinking the unthinkable, seeing the unseen.[23]

In other words, Niebuhr's dialectic between present history and the Kingdom of God beyond history lacks the imaginative vision of the

historically possible which stands at the nexus between things as they are and things as they ultimately will be. Niebuhr's 'impossible possibility' of the Kingdom impinging on the present can be perceived as a simple impossibility and therefore irrelevant and 'other-worldly'.

Another element which adds to pessimism concerning hope in the present is Niebuhr's avoidance of divine agency as a transforming power in history. Niebuhr's theology leaves one at the Cross of Christ as a revelation of God and indicates little significance in the ongoing presence and agency of God. The resurrection, pentecost, the Church as the community of faith, and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, have minor importance in Niebuhr's work. Niebuhr perceives history as an interim between the Cross and the eschaton which leaves one with the impression that the present has little potential and hope.

Against this pessimism is the need to recognize God's transforming presence as an immanent reality which makes possible the Kingdom of God in history *in fact* rather than simply *in principle*. This is not to deny that the ultimate realization of the Kingdom of God is beyond the end of history. It is rather the recognition that mutuality and relationships of love can be realized in human history and that mutuality and love can be the foundation for justice inspired by the transforming *agape* of God. As the Jewish theologian Abraham Heschel stated;

> Biblical history bears witness to the constant corruption of man; *it does not, however, teach the inevitable corruptibility of the ultimate in the temporal process. ... There are good moments in history that no subsequent evil may obliterate.* ... We believe that there are corners full of light in a vastness that is dark, that unalloyed good moments are possible. It is, therefore, difficult from the point of view of Biblical theology to sustain Niebuhr's view, *plausible and profound as it is.*[24]

Heschel's view of God places divine agency in the midst of history and envisions God as one who travels with us in our struggles to create community and justice. This vision of God would create a more balanced dialectic of divine transcendence and immanence. In this dialectic, God would not only be creator, judge, and redeemer in our past and future, but also in the ambiguities and struggles of the present.

As with all previous comments, this criticism of Niebuhr's conception of history does not alter the structure of his theology of justice. Rather, it causes a shift in emphasis towards ethical optimism. This criticism indicates the need and possibility of modifying the theological base of Niebuhr's theology of justice so that it reflects a more balanced view of the possible as well as the impossible. Through a modified conception of divine agency and an imaginative hope, the pragmatism of Niebuhr's ethic avoids a simple conservatism and his dialectic is maintained in a balance which more accurately reflects our experience of historical possibility.

The continuing significance of the Niebuhrian theology of justice

Niebuhr provides us with a theology of creative tension. He does not allow us the temptation to reduce justice to a simple coherence. In his theology of justice he maintains the ambiguity of historical experience and he limits excessive ethical optimism. In this creative tension Niebuhr provides us with a theology which is fundamentally integrative and dialogic. His theology, in its method, is inherently open to modification. These are the strengths of his theology and ethics. He does not allow us a simplistic optimism concerning ourselves and our history, nor does he claim the final word on theology, anthropology, or history.

It is because of this theological openness and flexibility that the above critique does not denigrate Niebuhr's theology, but instead modifies it. Because Niebuhr's theological method is pragmatic, it is open to dialogue. His 'truth' is verified in experience, and different experience calls for dialogue concerning 'truth'. In this manner Niebuhr's theological foundations are continually brought into dialogue with contemporary experience. This allows his theology of justice to develop, modify, and reform in light of new contexts and to become contemporary and relevant.

It is in recognition of the vitality and relevance of the Niebuhrian theology of justice that we bring it into dialogue with the experience of Latin American Christianity. If Niebuhr's theological realism is sufficiently integrative, it should be capable of embracing

the 'truth' of Liberation theology as well as provide critique of their weaknesses and limitations.

NOTES

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2. Judith Vaughan, *Sociality, Ethics, and Social Change: A Critical Appraisal of Reinhold Niebuhr's Ethics in the Light of Rosemary Radford Ruether's Works*, Lanham, University Press of America, 1983.
3. James Gustafson, "Theology in the service of Ethics: An Interpretation of Reinhold Niebuhr's Theological Ethics", in *Reinhold Niebuhr and the Issues of our Time*, Richard Harries ed.,London and Oxford, Mowbray, 1986, page 38.
4. Ibid., page 36.
5. Ibid., page 44.
6. Roger L. Shinn, "Realism, Radicalism, and Eschatology in Reinhold Niebuhr: A Reassessment", in *The Legacy of Reinhold Niebuhr*, Nathan A. Scott Jr. ed., Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1974, page 91.
7. Daphne Hampson, "Reinhold Niebuhr on Sin: A Critique", in *Reinhold Niebuhr and the Issues of our Time*, London and Oxford, Mowbray, 1986, pages 46 - 60.
8. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. I, New York, Charsles Scribner's Sons, 1941, page 228.
9. Judith Plaskow, *Sex, Sin and Grace: Women's Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich*, Washington, University Press of America, 1980, page 63.
10. Ibid., page 68.
11. Hampson, op. cit., page 56.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., page 54.
14. See above pages 8 and 9.
15. Paul Lehmann, "The Christology of Reinhold Niebuhr", in *Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social, and Political Thought*, Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall ed., New York, MacMillan, 1956, page 275.
16. Alan Richardson, "Reinhold Niebuhr as Apologist", in *Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social, and Political Thought*, Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall ed., New York, MacMillan, 1956, page 226.
17. Edward John Carnell, *The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr*, Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmanns, 1951, page 144.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., page 145.
20. Ibid.
21. Gustafson, op. cit., page 43.
22. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *The Radical Kingdom*, New York, Harper and Row, 1970, page 202.
23. Gabriel Fackre, "Realism and Vision", *Christianity and Crisis*, 30, April 13, 1970, page 72.

24. Abraham I. Heschel, "A Hebrew Evaluation of Reinhold Niebuhr", in *Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social, and Political Thought*, Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall ed., New York, MacMillan, 1956, page 406.

PART TWO: THE CHALLENGE OF LATIN AMERICAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY TO THE NIEBUHRIAN THEOLOGY OF JUSTICE.

5. LIBERATION THEOLOGY: THE CHALLENGE OF THEOLOGICAL METHOD

The comparison of two theologies requires some initial justification. There has to be basic and general reasons for placing Liberation theology in comparison with Reinhold Niebuhr's theology of justice. An initial answer to these questions is that Liberation theology is a theology of justice which takes its insights from the socio-political realities of the Third World. Although its concern for justice corresponds to Niebuhr's, its context for theological reflection differs. This difference in context leads Liberation theology to embrace methodologies, theological themes, and means of implementation which differ greatly from those embraced by Niebuhr. And yet, there is great similarity between Niebuhr's theology and the theology of liberation. It can be said that both theologies are biblical and christocentric. Both theologies could also be described as contextual, open or integrative, and as an ongoing process. In very general terms, these theologies seem somewhat similar. Consequently the rationale for a critical comparison between Niebuhr's theology of justice and Liberation Theology is found in both their similarities and differences. This critical comparison will also be dialectical in nature. We will be placing Niebuhrian theology in contrast with Liberation theology throughout the examination of Liberation theology. In this way, critique and assessment will occur throughout the study which will result in the modification of Niebuhrian theology.

The specific Liberation theology to be placed in comparison with Niebuhrian theology will be that written in Latin America. It is Latin American theologians such as Gustavo Gutiérrez, José Míguez Bonino, Leonardo Boff, Jon Sobrino, and others, who have produced theology relating a vision of justice in response to the socio-political problems unique to Latin America. This large body of literature, relating to the common experiences and problems of Latin America, provide a rich dialogue partner for Niebuhr concerning the

topic of justice. This is not to say that all Latin American Liberation theology will concern us in this comparison. Rather, it is Niebuhr's theology of justice which will set the agenda. This means that some Latin American Liberation theology will be treated as less appropriate than others as a focus for critique. Rubem Alves and his concern for language would be an example of Liberation theology which may have a peripheral role in later chapters. On the other hand, Ismael García and his work; *The Concept of Justice in Latin American Theology of Liberation*, will serve as a touchstone throughout this critical comparison.

What then is Latin American Liberation theology? Ismael García provides us with an initial definition.

> Liberation theology is that form of reflection that attempts to discern the religious significance of the socio-political struggles the poor are engaged in as they free themselves of their present state of political domination and economic exploitation.[1]

Liberation theology is not a theology which seeks to radicalize the socio-political environment of Latin America. Rather, theologians of liberation recognize that they do their work of theological reflection in a context which is already radicalized by political movements of liberation. For this reason Latin American theologians perceive their task of reflection as that of exploring the religious significance found in the context of structural oppression and the resulting yearning for liberation. García identifies this as a quest for identity.

> ...the reality of mass poverty and political powerlessness to which the people of this continent have been subjected and their struggles to overcome this burden are seen as religiously significant events, events that raise once more the question of what it means to be a Christian and what it means to be a Church in today's world.[2]

Because of this radicalized context, Liberation theology does not claim a neutral position from which to do theological reflection. Rather it is compelled to theologize from within a specific commitment. This commitment is to the poor and oppressed, and to their liberation.

Gustavo Gutiérrez understands this committed theological posture as reflection on faith as liberation praxis.

> It will be an understanding of the faith from an option and a commitment. It will be an understanding of the faith from a point of departure in real, effective solidarity with the exploited classes, oppressed ethnic groups, and despised cultures of Latin America, and from within their world. It will be a reflection that starts out from a commitment to create a just society, a community of sisters and brothers, and that ought to see that this commitment grows more radical and complete.[3]

It is within this commitment that Liberation theology is understood to be more than simply a rational consideration of classical theological themes. Within this commitment, theology itself is expected to be liberating, not merely a reflection on a new topic entitled 'liberation'. Correspondingly, Liberation theologians prefer to speak of *orthopraxis* rather than orthodoxy as the criterion for theology. For Juan Luis Segundo, this is a fundamental question concerning method in theology.

> It is my feeling that the most progressive theology in Latin America is more interested in *being liberative* than in *talking about liberation*. In other words, liberation deals not so much with content as with the method used to theologize in the face of our real-life situation.[4]

For Liberation theology it is the real-life situation, the socio-political context, which is the focal concern in theological reflection. Jon Sobrino understands that the problem of faith in Latin America is not the problem of rational coherence in relation to post-enlightment critical thought, but rather the problem of oppression which obscures the meaning of faith. It is the contextual problems of political and economic oppression which restrict human existence and distort faith. In this oppressive context Liberation theology works to transform the real-life situation and at the same time recover the meaning of faith.[5]

This theology can not be liberating if it is the product of academics restricted to the environment of the institutional setting. Gutiérrez understands that the *locus theologicus* for understanding the faith will be the life, preaching, and historical commitment of the

Church. This theological locus is specifically identified with the *comunidades de base* or 'base communities'. Gutiérrez is clear that these base communities are composed of, and oriented toward, the poor.

> When we say 'christian base communities', we do not mean lay people, nuns, and priests who are against the church hierarchy. 'Base' refers to the last people in society, the poor and those who are committed to them.[6]

In this way, theology can become liberating because it is the theological reflection oriented around those who suffer poverty and oppression. It is not a theology imposed from above, but rather a theology which has its roots in the life and experience of the people of Latin America.

In comparing Reinhold Niebuhr's theology of justice with this Latin American Liberation theology, we will be concerned to identify both similarities and differences. The differences will provide creative critique of Niebuhr's theology and lead to possible modification. These differences will be of two types. One type is comprised of differences which are not inherently exclusive in regard to Niebuhr's theology. These critical differences would perhaps point to a more thorough inclusive dialectic. The second type of difference would be that which is irreconcilable with Niebuhr's position and would indicate a focal point of contrast. The area of comparison which will be the concern of this chapter is that of methodology. Under this heading of methodology, we will be examining Liberation theology in regard to its use of praxis, dialectic and hermeneutics.

Pragmatism and historical praxis

Pragmatism and praxis are the terms with which are identified the central epistemological concerns of Niebuhrian theology and Liberation theology. In essence, both these terms are concerned to describe the relation between acting and knowing. And on this general level of comparison, pragmatism and praxis show a similarity of concern. Both are concerned to demonstrate that knowing occurs within the context of acting. Liberation theology understands that truth or knowledge is

verified within an action of modification or transformation. Gutiérrez is representative of this claim.

> Truth, for the contemporary human being, is something *verified*, something 'made true'. Knowledge of reality that leads to no modification of that reality is not verified, does not become true.[7]

Niebuhr differs somewhat from this position by locating verification in experience. This experience may in fact verify knowledge which has utility in modifying or transforming reality. But Niebuhr is not bound to a theory of knowledge which must result in some form of modification of reality. His position indicates that knowledge can be verified on the level of existential experience. Niebuhr understands that human transcendent freedom indicates a dimension of experience which transcends history. This transcendent dimension of human experience allows the human being to apprehend realities beyond the self. An example of this knowledge is that of the coherence or unity which is beyond the self. In this manner, knowledge comes as the result of the existential transcendence of the human subject. This is not to say that this type of knowledge is unrelated or insignificant in regard to history. But it is not to be reduced to verification by historical modification.

As regards theological method, both pragmatism and praxis indicate a movement from practice to theory. Niebuhrian theology agrees with Liberation theology that theological reflection is a 'second step' following involvement in the concrete realities of life. And for this reason both theologies can be described as contextual and as a process. Niebuhrian theology agrees with following statement by Gutiérrez concerning the contextual and relative nature of theological reflection.

> Theological reasoning is an effort on the part of concrete persons to form and think out their faith in determinate circumstances, to plan activities and make interpretations that play a role in the real-life occurrences and confrontations of a given society. The theologian does not work in some kind of ahistorical limbo. His or her reflection has a milieu, starts out from material bases, addresses us from a precise location, speaks the word of the Lord to us in the vernacular.[8]

Because of the relative and contextual nature of theological reflection, Liberation theology understands theology to be an ongoing process in history. Again Gutiérrez states;

> As critical reflection on society and the Church, theology is an understanding which both grows and, in a certain sense, changes. If the commitment of the Christian community in fact takes different forms throughout history, the understanding which accompanies the vicissitudes of this commitment will be constantly renewed and will take untrodden paths. A theology which has as its points of reference only "truths" which have been established once and for all - and not the Truth which is also a Way - can be only static and, in the long run, sterile.[9]

Niebuhrian theology agrees with Liberation theology that theology is never unconditioned, so as to claim to be absolute or have a universal applicability.

The fundamental difference between Niebuhr and Liberation theology is the emphasis placed upon history. For Liberation theology, praxis is necessarily 'historical' praxis. It is always concerned with the modification of historical realities. For Liberation theology, the transformation of history is the event and place where knowledge and truth are realized. Commenting on Hugo Assmann and Gustavo Gutiérrez, Míguez Bonino articulates this distinction as follows;

> When Assmann speaks of the rejection of 'any *logos* which is not the *logos* of a *praxis*' or Gutierrez writes about an 'epistemological split', they are not merely saying that truth must be applied, or even that truth is related to its application. They are saying, in fact, that there is no truth outside or beyond the concrete historical events in which men are involved as agents. There is, therefore, no knowledge except in action itself, in the process of transforming the world through participation in history.'[10]

Niebuhr does not deny that human beings are fundamentally historical creatures and that all knowledge occurs within the context of history. But, he embraces a broader epistemology in his emphasis on experience. He agrees that the transformation of history is a point at which human beings express their transcendent freedom and are able, through creativity, to verify truth or knowledge. But Niebuhr also

claims that there are other existential encounters with reality which also verify truth, yet do not involve the necessary modification of that reality. This is particularly true of the encounter with God which reveals human sin and divine grace. The experience of justification by grace through faith does not fit into an epistemology limited to verification by modification of reality.

Another problem that Niebuhrian theology has with historical praxis is that it is an epistemology grounded in Marxism. Sobrino is representative of many Liberation theologians on this point.

> ...the liberating function of theological understanding does not consist in explaining or giving meaning to an existing reality or to the faith as threatened by a particular situation, but in transforming a reality so that it may take on meaning and the lost or threatened meaning of the faith may thereby also be recovered. In this general sense, the influence of Marx on the conception of theological understanding is evident. His *Thesis XI on Feuerbach* is the paradigm for the liberative aspect of theological understanding. To transform does not mean to look for an intelligible form whereby reality may be ordered for the mind; it means to give a new form to a now wretched reality. Theological understanding is thus inseparable from the practical and the ethical and cannot be reduced to the giving of explinations.''

From the perspective of Niebuhrian theology, the concept of historical praxis must be questioned concerning its exclusivity in relation to restricting verification of knowledge to the modification or transformation of history. Such a restrictive epistemology seems to simplify the ambiguity of historical experience, as well as ignore a transcendent trans-historical reality.

It is at this point that Niebuhrian pragmatism appears to be more integrative than historical praxis. Niebuhr's pragmatism seeks coherence with larger environments of ideas and experience. For this reason theological pragmatism would grant the priority of commitment to liberation and the priority of action over discourse within the context of Latin America. It would be pragmatic, under a love ideal and in a context of oppression and dehumanization, to place theology under a commitment to liberation. But this would not be a restrictive theology grounded in historical praxis. Liberation theology appears to be vulnerable to realization as reflection within a restrictive context.

While Niebuhr's theology is contextual in order to be relevant, Liberation theology faces the danger of being exclusive in its commitment to being contextual.

Another dimension of this problem is raised by Dennis McCann concerning the issue of ideology.

> While ideology is primarily an existential problem for Niebuhr, it is primarily a cognitive problem for liberation theologians. If - as Niebuhr assumes - experience is more or less reliable, then ideological conflicts may be understood as more or less transparent expressions of the will to power inherent in human nature. If - as liberation theologians assume - experience is radically problematic, then ideological conflicts may reflect objective differences rooted in the structures of society.'[2]

McCann identifies the epistemological problem between Niebuhr and Liberation theology. In some sense it is the old problem of nature verses nurture. Niebuhr looks to 'nature' or an anthropology grounded in the existential limitations and possibilities of human knowing. Liberation theology, on the other hand, looks to 'nurture' or structures and systems of socio-political life which limit the possibilities of human knowing. Of course, both positions are 'true' and verified in experience. They only become problematic if they are perceived as mutually exclusive.

The point where historical praxis confronts the Niebuhrian theology of justice is in the area of historical commitment. While Niebuhrian theology has a broader epistemological foundation and a more open or integrative method, it must be questioned concerning its effectiveness or relevancy in a concrete socio-political context. This suspicion will be pursued as we compare the use of dialectic in Liberation theology and Niebuhrian theology.

Dialectic method

Praxis also comes under the heading of dialectic. As Míguez Bonino recognizes, praxis inherently involves a dialectic process.

> Praxis, and only human action can be called praxis, is indeed in itself already a dialectical concept involving both theory and action. It is dialectical also in a further sense, in that the

> two terms (theory and praxis) are not related to one another in a sort of stable equilibrium; such perfect harmonization could be produced only in the realm of thought, falling back on pure idealism in which dialectics would come to an end. On the contrary, instead of a balanced harmony we must think in terms of two poles that challenge each other, making change and movement possible. Action overflows and challenges the theory that has informed it; and thought, projecting the shape and future of reality, pushes action to new ventures. Reality is transformed through human action, and action is corrected and reoriented by reality. This dialectical interplay seems to be the necessary presupposition for political ethics.[13]

This dialectical movement within praxis is not restricted to the historical present. Liberation theology understands that praxis must be in dialectic relationship with both the past and the future. Rubem Alves understands that the past presents us with 'promise' which modifies present praxis.

> Through the promise which the past presents, man is made free to think about the possibility of a new tomorrow. The act of remembering is thus, as an expression of love for the present - and only as such - a liberating possibility. It provides new grounds for negation, new possibilities of hope, new freedom for action. It is this dialectical relationship that keeps the language of faith always in permanent movement.[14]

This dialectic with the past involves an examination of scripture and tradition. Míguez Bonino understands that scripture provides the theologian with the witness of 'germinal' events of faith which are explored by means of such concepts as liberation, righteousness, *shalom*, the poor, and love. Some of these 'germinal' events are God's dealing with Israel, the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the hope of the Kingdom.[15] In similar manner, praxis involves a dialectic with the future. Liberation theology understands that praxis must occur within an eschatological framework. It is in light of the Kingdom of God that current praxis is inspired.

It is this dialectical content of praxis which provides theology with its critical dimension. As Alves noted above, the past provides a negation to the present. Raul Vidales makes the same observation concerning the future. He states that theology; "detects and spells out the concrete experiences of liberation going on around it; at the

same time ... it maintains a critical outlook in order to offer provocation, in order to keep prodding us on toward the final consummation".[16]

It is concerning this dimension of dialectic that Niebuhrian theology faces serious critique. It is questionable whether Niebuhr's theology has a functional dialectic relationship with the past and future. This criticism of Niebuhr will be examined below under the comparison between hermeneutical procedure.

On the level of general comparison, it can be said that Liberation theology and Niebuhrian theology are both dialectical theologies. Beyond this simple comparison, one quickly encounters fundamental differences. Both theologies are dialectical in the sense that they both recognize a dynamic quality in thought and reality wherein creative and destructive tension exists between various elements. In other words, both theologies recognize the conflictual nature of change. Where these theologies differ is in possibilities, significance and outcome of the dialectical process.

Liberation theology has adopted a historical dialectic which follows the 'thesis-antithesis-synthesis' or 'negation of the negation' paradigm. Liberation theology perceives this dialectic as the dynamic quality of history. In this historical process, the present historical moment contains within it the seeds of its own transformation. Gutiérrez gives us an example of this historical dialectic.

> The present in the praxis of liberation, in its deepest dimension, is pregnant with the future; hope must be an inherent part of our present commitment in history. Theology does not initiate this future which exists in the present. It does not create the vital attitude of hope out of nothing. Its role is more modest. It interprets and explains these as the true underpinnings of history. ... To reflect upon a forward directed action is not to concentrate on the past. It does not mean being the caboose of the present. Rather it is to penetrate the present reality, the movement of history, that which is driving history toward the future. To reflect on the basis of the historical praxis of liberation is to reflect in the light of the future which is believed in and hoped for. It is to reflect with a view to action which transforms the present.[17]

Liberation theology understands that history is a conflictual process which can be progressive and cumulative. Gutiérrez identifies

this progressive dimension of history in the fulfillment of divine promise in history. As Gutiérrez states; "Human history is in truth nothing but the history of the slow, uncertain, and surprising fulfillment of Promise".[18] The possibility of a cumulative process in history is illustrated by García concerning the growth of justice.

> The quest for justice and human rights is radically historical. At different times different freedoms and rights have been struggled for by different history bearing groups. Each of them represents a contribution, leaving us with a permanent imprint in our present understanding of what a just state of affairs is. The old and the new achieve new levels of synthesis.[19]

This cumulative process is not to be understood as necessary progress toward greater forms of justice. This cumulative process can also be regressive toward greater forms of injustice.

This perspective of historical dialectic differs from that of Niebuhr's theology. From the perspective of realism, any claim for a historical process which is cumulative or progressive, is to be questioned. From Niebuhr's position, such claims obscure the ambiguity of history and human agency. Niebuhr's dialectic avoids a synthetic understanding of historical progress. This is not to deny the cumulative processes in history whereby knowledge or technology find growth. It is rather the recognition that Niebuhr's dialectic is always one of tension which allows no simple interpretation of history. This tension is the result of limited nature of human agency and the perennial presence of sin in historical ambition. For Niebuhr, any growth in justice is always accompanied by a corresponding potential for injustice.

As with our comparison of pragmatism and praxis, Niebuhr's dialectic is the broader of the two theologies. While Liberation theology embraces a historical dialectic, Niebuhr embraces a dialectic which is existential as well as historical. The dialectics of realism include a much broader field of human experience moving from organic to transcendent human existence; from communal life to individual life; from human yearning for the absolute and unconditioned to transcendent divine self-disclosure.

A primary element of the historical dialectic of Liberation theology is the presence of God in history. Liberation theology understands God to be immanent in history. Sobrino illustrates this immanent understanding of God's presence in his examination of historical mediations of theological meaning. Sobrino states that; "... the concrete mediations of theological understanding are those realities that point by contrariety to the wholly other - other not because it is beyond present reality but because it contradicts present reality".[20] In this understanding of God's presence as immanence, God becomes the dialectical negation of the negation. Because of this divine immanence in history, Sobrino can understand the present historical moment as the time and place in which God continues self revelation. This provides Liberation theology with a strong basis for a doctrine of pneumatology.

> While we must make a technical distinction between the revelation of God in the past and the manifestation of God in the present, it is clear that faith here and now can only be a response to the manifestation of God here and now. Theology must therefore be reflection on faith as currently practiced, on the response given here and now to the manifestation of God. ... Arguing a priori, if pneumatology has any role to play in the real life of the church, if we accept that the Spirit of God continually acts in history and in the Church, then we should not be surprised by the idea that we are to search continually for the manifestation of God in our times. Nor should it surprise us that the manifestation will take on new forms during new times.[21]

Liberation theology understands the presence of God to be mediated in the concreteness of historical experience. For Liberation theology, this divine mediation occurs through the presence of the poor and oppressed and those committed to the poor and oppressed. Sobrino understands the 'Otherness' of God to be mediated in the 'otherness' of the oppressed.

> In Latin America, theology has been less concerned with the language used in speaking of God than with the concrete mediation of God. The mediation of the absolutely Other takes the form of those who are really 'other': the oppressed. In the oppressed the Other is discovered dialectically and through a sharing of suffering. But the break required in order to grasp the Other comes through the real break occasioned by the oppressed. The oppressed challenge us with regard to our own identity. The break

> therefore takes place not at the level of self-understanding or feeling but at the level of reality. Conversion comes, as in the gospel, through those who are historically 'other' in relation to us: the oppressed.[22]

It is this mediation of divine significance through the 'otherness' of the poor and oppressed that Enrique Dussel identifies as the *alteridad del projimo* or 'transformation of the neighbour'.[23]

As the concrete mediation of God's presence, the poor and oppressed take on a role of confrontation as regards the present state of affairs. Following Marxist historical dialectic, the poor and oppressed take on a role corresponding to the proletariat. They become the impetus for the transformation of society as well as the historical mediation of meaning. Gutiérrez provides an example of this analysis in his rejection of progress through a gradual reform of present socio-political structures and culture.

> The point of departure of the theology of liberation is not only different from that of the progressivist theology, it is in contradiction with it. The contradiction can be grasped only in the real world of history. To speak of the 'postmodern world' is a superficial response, and of little help. It is not a matter of chronological order, but of concrete historical and dialectical contradiction. This dialectical opposition to the bourgeois ideology and the dominant culture comes up out of the popular classes, and from their vanguard. The exploited strata of society are the concrete, historical agents of a new understanding of the faith. The God of the Bible reveals himself through those despoiled of their dignity as a people and as human beings. He manifests himself in those the gospel calls 'the poor' and 'the least'.[24]

Míguez Bonino recognizes a danger in this dialectic of immanence. He perceives that this theology has put itself at risk by reducing the transcendence of God to historical dynamics. He makes this point in commenting on the hermeneutical procedure and ideological commitment of Liberation theology.

> (Liberation theology) appears as the hopeless prisoner of a hermeneutical circle, the spell of which it cannot break. The text of Scripture and tradition is forced into the Proscrustean bed of ideology, and the theologian who has fallen prey of this procedure is forever condemned to listen only to the echo of his own ideology. There is no redemption for this theology, because it has muzzled the Word of God in its transcendence and freedom.

> ... In fact, it seems to me that our Latin American theology of liberation has not yet become sufficiently aware of the weight of this risk and consequently has not yet developed adequate safeguards against it.[25]

Here we recognize Niebuhr's strength and weakness in relation to Liberation theology. Niebuhr's theological strength is a dialectic wherein God is transcendent and ethical action is under the judgement of a transcendent ethic of self-giving love. This 'impossible possibility' is sacrificial love which is God's possibility and our impossibility. According to this transcendent dialectic all human action is judged and inspired to new approximations of the ideal. Yet Niebuhr's understanding of divine transcendence is similar to Liberation theology in that God is not removed from historical existence. He differs from Liberation theology in the degree that God is epistemologically transcendent. God is always immanent in history, yet his presence is 'hidden' and not easily identifiable with any human activity or creation of history.

The weakness of Niebuhr's position in light of Liberation theology is its seemingly lack of historical commitment. The danger of Niebuhr's theology is that it can be perceived as emphasizing the dialectic of transcendence to the loss of immanence. In this theology, transcendent judgement and historical ambiguity blunt any ethical commitment and obscure the validity of any concrete historical action. This weakness of Niebuhrian theology becomes explicit in the examination of hermeneutical procedure.

Hermeneutical procedure

Liberation theology uses a hermeneutical circle in its interpretive process. The content of this process is the result of decisions made concerning language, ideology, and social science. Before examining this hermeneutical circle, these elements need to be explicated as to their role in the theological process.

For Liberation theology, theological language is contextual and subject to a dialectical process of modification. For Alves, a static language is a dead language. "The life of the language of faith ...

depends on its ability to negate itself, to change, to die in order to gain a new life".[26] Because this language is part of a living process, theological language is never merely descriptive, it is also a language of imagination.

> The language of the community of faith, consequently, is an expression of imagination. It is not purely descriptive. A purely descriptive language transforms facts into values. Imagination, by rejecting the facts as its limit, expresses reason's transcendence over the given. Imagination is a form of critique of what is, an expression of negation, a function of reason that is dependent on man's spirit, on his power to move beyond the closed world of the facts. A purely descriptive language is able only to name the things that are present and thereby sets them as the limit for man's freedom. A language created by imagination is able to 'name the things that are absent' and when it does this it breaks the spell of the things that are present.[27]

As a contextual language, Segundo understands that theology is always bound up with its socio-political context. "The liberation theologian's suspicion is that anything and everything involving ideas, including theology, is intimately bound up with the existing social situation in at least an unconscious way".[28] This means that theology, in its contextual and dynamic process, is never neutral. Míguez Bonino states that there are no nonpartisan languages.

> Today we know enough about language, thanks to structural analysis, to realize that the meaning of a language is determined not simply by the intention of the speaker but through the code or context of meanings which are already present and into which the pronounced word becomes inserted, independently of the speaker's intention. ... The question, therefore, is not what is intended with words, but how do they operate. And they always operate in a given direction. There are, from this point of view, no nonpartisan languages.[29]

For Liberation theology, theological language always contains a ideological dimension. The question which Liberation theology asks of theology concerns the intentionality of its choice of language and corresponding ideology. For Míguez Bonino, ideology; "... is the instrument through which our Christian obedience gains coherence and unity".[30] Thus, the choice of language, with its inherent ideological commitment, must serve the commitment of faith in a given historical

context. Míguez Bonino, in this way understands theology as a discipline which must make decisions about language and the socio-political options connected with that language.

> The choice of a language is never a purely neutral or formal decision. In the very act, a realm of reality, or better said, a relation to reality is introduced as subject matter of theology. This is particularly so in the political case, when categories chosen do not merely intend to describe human existence but to shape and transform it. A theology cast in political terms cannot satisfy itself with reformulating in a new way the theological heritage; it has to grapple with the dynamics of the language it uses. It has to concern itself with its relation to power. The words it uses belong to a context of militancy. The categories of analysis in which it casts its reflection are engaged categories and, as they gain a certain determinant power, the theologian cannot remain any more above the realm of political options.[31]

It is at this point that we begin to comprehend why Liberation theology chooses the language of social sciences. It is the explicit concern of Liberation theology to participate in the transformation of a particular historical reality. Therefore the language most appropriate is one which is operational rather than philosophical. Sobrino is representative of this choice by Liberation theologians of the operational language of the social sciences.

> If the problem of theology is to give meaning, then there will be a spontaneous appeal to philosophy. In this case philosophy is understood in the traditional manner as the model for universal understanding; it can therefore serve for a expression of meaning. If, however, the concern is the liberation of the real world from its wretched state, theology will turn spontaneously to the social sciences. For they analyse the concrete misery of the real world, the mechanisms that create it, and consider possible models of liberation from it.[32]

The choice of a language and of a method of analysis provided by a social science is not an arbitrary decision. Liberation theology chooses a specific science to serve within a commitment of faith. As we have already seen, this commitment is to the poor or oppressed. García understands this to be the criteria for selecting a social science. "The needs of the poor and the creation of a new society that will enable them to overcome their poverty and domination serve as the criteria by which these theologians choose among the social

sciences".[33] Following this criteria, Liberation theology has chosen Marxist analysis as the most appropriate science for the Latin American context. Míguez Bonino clarifies this choice as one of objective rationality and historical appropriateness.

> Nobody will claim, in fact, that his analysis of social, political, and economic reality is more than a rational exercise, open to revision, correction, or rejection. It is in this sense that we incorporate the Marxist analysis of society. The point is of great importance and the source of many misunderstandings. Our assumption of Marxism has nothing to do with a supposedly abstract or eternal theory or with dogmatic formulae - a view which is not absent in certain Marxist circles - but with a scientific analysis and a number of verifiable hypothesis in relation to conditions obtaining in certain historical moments and places and which, properly modified, corrected, and supplemented, provide an adequate means to grasp our own historical situation (insofar, moreover, as it is closely related and significantly shaped by the model originally analyzed).[34]

Following the adoption of Marxist social analysis, Míguez Bonino names the elements of Marxist theory which become the criteria for critique of social praxis.

> The social (collective) appropriation of the means of production, the suppression of a classiest society, the de-alienation of work, the suppression of a slave consciousness, and the reinstallation of man as agent of his own history are the theoretical hypotheses on the basis of which revolutionary praxis is predicated. They become, therefore, *intrinsic tests* for such praxis. A consistent engagement demands a constant criticism in these terms.[35]

In adopting Marxist analysis as a critical science, Liberation theology is concerned to separate itself from the dogmatic expressions of the Marxism of Europe. Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff exemplify this concern to demonstrate that Liberation theology is only interested in Marxism as a scientific method.

> Dialectical analysis is science, divorced from its philosophical presuppositions, divorced from dialectical materialism. Science is knowledge submitted to control by experimentation and verification. Philosophy is a universalizing interpretation of being and global history. It is Marxist science, and only science, that will serve our purposes.[36]

Niebuhrian theology is suspicious concerning the anthropological presuppositions as well as the societal expectations of this use of Marxism. But it must be recognized that Niebuhr's pragmatic method would not necessarily reject Marxism as an analytical science appropriate to the context of Latin America. While Niebuhrian theology would modify and critique such an analytical method from the perspective of anthropological realism, it could accept its utility on pragmatic grounds. The strength of Marxist analysis is its recognition of the destructive potential of capitalism. This destructive dimension of capitalism is not a theoretical possibility in Latin America, it is a reality of current history. Thus, Marxism provides language and concepts which help theology come to an understanding of how such socio-political states come into existence and help to explore possible resolutions to such exploitive conditions.

This adoption of Marxist analysis by Liberation theology leads to a serious critique of Niebuhrian theology. Míguez Bonino makes a general comment concerning theologies which pivot on ethical principles. This comment could apply directly to Niebuhrian theology.

> There are ... a number of Christians who, while unreservedly taking up the cause of the oppressed, refuse (or at least take with great reticence) elements of the Marxist analysis such as the class struggle, the role of the proletariat, and other elements. The problem is that instead they usually assert 'ethical principles' which, lacking a vigorous historical mediation, not infrequently end up in frustration, inability to act or different forms of reformism.[37]

Here again we perceive the weakness in Niebuhrian theology concerning the dominance of transcendence in theological dialectic. While Niebuhrian theology can critique Marxist themes on the grounds of anthropological realism and historical ambiguity, it can not avoid the criticism of lacking a 'vigorous historical mediation'. Niebuhrian theology of justice pivots around *agape*, the ethical ideal of self-sacrifical love. This ethical ideal becomes the focus for the transcendent commitment of theology. But Liberation theology raises the question of imminent historical commitment. Without this vigorous historical commitment, the Niebuhrian theology of justice does not have a balanced dialectic wherein justice is assessed and modified. It is

this lack of a vigorous historical mediation which allows Alves to accuse Christian Realism of being the ideology of the establishment; in other words, of serving the economic and political ideologies of North America.[38]

This examination of language, ideology, and social science, provide us with the background needed to understand the content of Liberation theology's hermeneutical procedure. García understands this procedure to entail a hermeneutical circle which is a never-ending process. "The method is depicted as a never-ending dialectic between theory and practice, i.e., a hermeneutical circle between the concrete socio-political and historical praxis of the community of faith and its interpretation of Scripture, the theological tradition and in particular its interpretation of God's historical presence".[39] The focus of this hermeneutical process is always present historical existence. It begins with analysis of present historical praxis, moves to examine Scripture and tradition, and then returns to reinterpret the present.

The first moment in this hermeneutical circle is the analysis of the historical present. As Leonardo Boff states; "Liberation theology begins with an *analytical, sociological, and structural reading of reality that is as scientific as possible*".[40] For Liberation theology this means a critical reading of socio-political as well as ecclesial practices of present historical existence. This involves the examination of the Church's practice, it's language and the ideologies implicit in its language. This first moment in the hermeneutical circle is a moment of critical self-awareness. It asks how the socio-political and economic structures and systems are functioning in the present historical moment; and it asks what role the Church is fulfilling within those systems and structures. Segundo understands that this first moment of the hermeneutical procedure should result in questions which encourage an openness in the theological process. For him, the creation of questions serve as a precondition for the hermeneutical circle to be fruitful.

> The first precondition is that the questions rising out of the present be rich enough, general enough, and basic enough to force us to change our customary conceptions of life, death, knowledge,

> society, politics, and the world in general. Only a change of this sort, or at the very least a pervasive suspicion about our ideas and value judgements concerning those things, will enable us to reach the theological level and force theology to come back down to reality and ask itself new and decisive questions.[41]

The second moment in the hermeneutical procedure of Liberation theology is essentially a moment of listening. With questions and relative self-awareness, we hear the witness of scripture and tradition. In this hermeneutical move, it is scripture which is the primary concern of theology. Vidales identifies scripture as the 'soul' of theology. For him, scripture is the locus of the word of God and therefore of primary importance as authority.

> This biblical perspective places liberation theology within the most solid and sound tradition of Christian theology. The pre-eminet function of Scripture is indisputable, as is the functional character of the church and the magisterium and their service role. Once again Scripture becomes the soul of theology, as it is meant to be.[42]

While tradition has a place of importance in the hermeneutical process, it is secondary to and dependent on the witness of scripture.

Segundo understands this hermeneutical circle to involve an interpretation of scripture which continually changes according to the questions and self-knowledge resulting from analysis of the present historical context.

> Here is a preliminary definition of the hermeneutic circle: it is the continuing change in our interpretation of the Bible which is dictated by the continuing changes in our present-day reality, both individual and societal. ... And the circular nature of this interpretation stems from the fact that each new reality obliges us to interpret the word of God afresh, to change reality accordingly, and then to go back and reinterpret the word of God again, and so on.[43]

It is this dynamic understanding of the interpretation of scripture which Segundo understands to be a second precondition for the effectiveness of the hermeneutical procedure.

> The second precondition is intimately bound up with the first. If theology somehow assumes that it can respond to the new questions without changing its customary interpretation of the Scriptures,

> that immediately terminates the hermeneutical circle. Moreover, if our interpretation of Scripture does not change along with the problems, then the latter will go unanswered; or worse, they will receive old, conservative, unserviceable answers.[44]

Liberation theology understands this interpretive process to require the full depth of exegetical science. Míguez Bonino states that we are to use historical, literary, traditio-historical, and linguistic critical instruments to examine the 'germinal' events of faith which we find in scripture. The primary purpose of this exegetical procedure is to discover the historical significance of the biblical witness.

> ... we must insist that the penetration of the original historicity of the biblical events is basic for its present demand and efficacy. Consequently, however questionable and imperfect, the critical use of the instruments that help us reach a better understanding of this historicity is indispensable for a reflection on our Christian obedience today.[45]

It is the historical dimension of scripture which is the hermeneutic concern for Liberation theology. This historical dimension is the medium by which theology is confronted concerning the presence of God in history and the role of the Church in the present and the future. Vidales provides an example of this dynamic view of scripture.

> ... the Bible is not to be read as a Magna Carta but rather as a creative and provocative witness to our mission in the world. This focus will do a great deal to keep us from abstract interpretations that simply try to comprehend the past in terms of the present. It will force us to keep trying to comprehend the temporal dimension of the biblical word which finds its incarnation in the present, its trans-temporal and metahistorical dimension in the future, and the dynamic interrelationship between the two.[46]

Míguez Bonino does not claim that this hermeneutic process provides an interpretation which in its scientific method is free from ideological bias. Rather, he understands that the interpretive process entails not only an examination of the text, but also an examination of the interpreter. "Every interpretation of the texts which is offered to us (whether as exegesis or as systematic or as ethical interpretation) must be investigated in relation to the praxis out of

which it comes".[47] Thus, at this second moment in the hermeneutical circle, critical self-awareness is also fundamental to the success of interpretation.

Tradition, as part of this hermeneutical circle, also comes under critical analysis. Tradition is subject to critique concerning its relation to the witness of scripture as well as to its ideological role. While theological tradition must be assessed as an interpretation, explanation, and application of biblical and theological themes, it must also be assessed according to its socio-political significance. García claims that tradition must be subject to continual reformulation.

> It demands a reformulation, a purification, as it were, of the distortions that result not only from the socio-historical limitations of the author in question -- the limitation of vision and understanding natural to every finite creature -- but also from the personal and collective sin of which everyone is part.[48]

It is this examination of scripture and tradition which provides theology with criteria, principles and guidance concerning the questions arising out of the context of the interpreter. From this second moment in the hermeneutical circle, the interpreter moves to the third moment with the theological insights gained from exegesis. This third moment in the hermeneutical circle is a moment of reinterpretation and application. It is thus a moment of prophecy and ethical action. Gutiérrez understands this to be the role of theology linked to praxis.

> ... theology thus understood, that is to say as linked to praxis, fulfils a prophetic function insofar as it interprets historical events with the intention of revealing and proclaiming their profound meaning. ... But if theology is based on this observation of historical events and contributes to the discovery of their meaning, it is with the purpose of making the Christian's commitment within them more radical and clear.[49]

Leonardo and Clodovis Boff understand this prophetic moment as an interpretation of the present historical context through the categories of faith.

> These categories of faith, as grasped by and set forth in the scriptures, afford the possibility of an *interpretation* ... of the justice or the injustice of a given social configuration as the presence of salvation or perdition, the presence of the kingdom of God or of the antikingdom, the presence of grace or of sin. Faith adds nothing to the social configuration *ontologically*: it sees, within that configuration, its *theological moment*, and explicates it theologically.[50]

As already stated, these theological normative criteria not only allow a theological interpretation of the historical present, they also provide guidance for ethical action. Gutiérrez believes this to be the ultimate legitimation of the exegetical process. "In the final instance the exegesis of the Word, to which theology wishes to contribute, is accomplished in deeds".[51] But Liberation theology understands that there is no direct application of criteria derived from scripture to the socio-political options of present history. García is representative in identifying this function as one of reason embodied in the social sciences.

> No one has the right to argue that one's analysis of the present state of affairs and one's prescribed solutions to solve its problems are directly derived from scripture and the theological tradition. Neither of these provides by itself enough resources to construct a socio-political program or to decide which among the available programs is the best. ... Political options and social analysis are primordially a matter of scientific rationality. Their selection, while it must agree or be consistent with our theological convictions and commitments, must be justified rationally. A theology engaged in the struggle of social justice, thus, needs to use the tools and procedures provided by the social sciences.[52]

García also perceives that this indirect application of theological criteria reveals the relative and limited quality in theology. This indirect application allows no simple dogmatic claim for theology over particular socio-political options. For this reason García understands that application of theological criteria continually involves dialogue within the community of faith.

> Such knowledge (theological) is always mediated and very much subject to human fallibility. The best we can claim is that our views and options seem not to contradict God's purpose as revealed in Scripture and understood by tradition. We are obliged to remain attentive to the views of others as we proceed to assert

> our basic convictions on these matters. The community of faith is obligated to be a community of socio-political discourse.[53]

In this hermeneutical circle, we see that the third moment of application and interpretation is also the first moment of questioning and self-awareness. For Liberation theology, scientific social analysis and theological assessment are two sides to one interpretive moment where historical praxis is evaluated. For this theology, the historical present is a moment of analysis, assessment and application; in continual movement between the sources of theological values and their application in life.

The point at which Niebuhrian theology comes into conflict with this hermeneutic is its concern for historical interpretation. Liberation theology perceives in the historicity of the biblical texts a paradigm for God's presence in the historical present. These texts provide the hermeneutic principles for the perception of God's involvement and commitment. It is on the basis of the perceived solidarity of God with the poor and oppressed in scripture, that Liberation theology understands God's present solidarity with the poor and oppressed. Where Niebuhrian theology comes into conflict with this interpretive process is its confidence in historical interpretation. For Niebuhr, the meaning of history is not immediately accessible. Historical meaning is always subject to a dimension of mystery. This interpretation of history is further complicated by the distorted perception of human beings. No reading of history, past or present, is free from human self-regard which seeks to universalize a particular history for reasons of self-interest. While Niebuhrian theology is in agreement with the critical processes incorporated in the hermeneutic procedure of Liberation theology, it asserts that the interpretation of history is never free of bias and self-interest. This Niebuhrian position would mitigate any strong interpretive posture claimed by Liberation theology concerning the knowledge of God's movement in history.

To turn this critique around, it is precisely at this point that Liberation theology demonstrates its superior hermeneutic. The strength of Niebuhr's hermeneutic is its suspicion of historical

interpretation. It's weakness is that it seems to exclude the historical dimension from its hermeneutic procedure. In centring hermeneutics around the concepts of symbol and myth, Niebuhr indicates his commitment to existential concerns. For Niebuhrian theology, symbol and myth are the medium in scripture and theology which point to a realm of meaning surrounded by mystery. In this use of symbol and myth, divine and human relations are illustrated in scripture and verified as 'true' by experience in the present encounter between the human and divine. The strength of this hermeneutic is that it avoids the whole discussion of historical veracity. What is 'true' about scripture is what can be verified by current experience; not what can be established as historically 'true'. Thus, Niebuhr can interpret the early chapters of Genesis as myth which indicate the existential predicament of human life. The problem with this hermeneutic is that in avoiding the questions of historical reference, Niebuhr also avoids the issues of historical relevance. He does not ask what role these texts played as they were redacted in the socio-political context of Babylonian captivity. This is not to say that Niebuhr completely avoids discussion of God's action in history. But his emphasis is on God's action in the biblical past or in the eschatological future. In the 'interim' between these points of divine activity, hermeneutics seems to be only concerned with the existential dimension of the divine-human relationship and not with a reading of God's movement in present history.

This hermeneutic move between myth and symbol and present experience does not seem to incorporate the dynamic character of Niebuhr's dialectic. In avoiding the historical dimension of the biblical text and the present moment, Niebuhr looses his dialectic. In this regard, the hermeneutic circle of Liberation theology provides us with a stronger dialectic hermeneutic corresponding to Niebuhr's theological dialectic. Once again we become aware of the weakness in Niebuhrian theology concerning its trans-historical emphasis. This is not to say that Niebuhr's interpretive concepts are inappropriate. It is rather to recognize that a dialectical hermeneutic needs both existential and historical dimensions in its interpretive procedure in order to be fully relevant. It is the recognition that we need to ask

not only who we are in relation to God's past and future action, but to ask in relation to God's present movement in history.

Summary of methodological concerns in relation to the Niebuhrian theology of justice

In the above comparison with Liberation theology we have seen that Niebuhr's dialectic and theological pragmatism provide us with a theological method which is relatively more open, integrative and flexible. Niebuhrian theology provides us with a general method that functions on a more trans-cultural and trans-historical level. This prevents his theology from being reduced to a closed parochialism or to a narrow historical perspective. At the same time, Niebuhrian theology is contextual and and seeks to be relevant to the historical moment. The question which Liberation theology raises of Niebuhrian theology is the specific mediation of this methodological relevancy. While Niebuhrian theology provides a general method which results in analysis of regulative principles, political institutions, and economic systems, Liberation theology questions the particular locus for the assessment of justice. This questioning does not reveal a weakness in the dialectic or pragmatic method, but rather questions its content and dialectic breadth. From the perspective of Liberation theology, Niebuhrian theology is in danger of being too general and not specific enough in its assessment of justice in the particular historical context.

This criticism finds a focus in theological presuppositions which guide the pursuit of justice. Niebuhr develops his theology from the perspective of the transcendent ideal of self-giving love. While this gives him a foundation from which to assess the different expressions of power in the socio-political and economic sphere, it does not provide a point of assessment grounded in the perspective of the powerless within a particular historical context. Liberation theology asserts that such assessment of justice should occur from within a commitment to the poor and oppressed. This commitment results from a reading of scripture wherein God is perceived as being in solidarity with the poor. Here we find the hermeneutical differences between

Liberation theology and Niebuhrian theology which result in different theological presuppositions concerning the assessment of justice. Niebuhr embraces a trans-historical, transcendent ideal while Liberation theology looks to an immanent historical mediation. In this comparison of hermeneutics, Niebuhrian theology is the weaker of the two and needs to incorporate the historical dimension into the hermeneutical procedure. This would broaden the theological foundation which informs the Niebuhrian dialectic and pragmatism.

If we broaden the Niebuhrian dialectic to include immanent historical mediation as well as transcendent trans-historical ideal, we find that Liberation theology provides emphasis and procedure which result in a balanced method. This balanced method would include a dialectical concern with immanence which would revolve around the commitment of theology to the poor and would have religious and procedural dimensions. From the perspective of procedure, this commitment would mean that theology has its locus in the community of faith which is in solidarity with, and composed of, the poor and oppressed. From the religious perspective, this commitment of theology to the poor would mean the recognition of divine presence in the relationship with the 'other' of the poor and oppressed. In this *alteridad del projimo* or transformation of the neighbour, the presence of the poor is given theological significance and incorporated into the practice of faith. Through recognition of the significance of the *comunidades del base* or base communities and the *alteridad del projimo*, the commitment of theology to the poor is given a vigorous historical mediation which can function in a creative dialectic with Niebuhrian transcendent love idealism.

NOTES

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27. Ibid., page 166.
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29. Míguez Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, op. cit., page 80.
30. Míguez Bonino, *Revolutionary Theology comes of age*, op. cit., page 95.

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6. SIN AND THE NEED FOR LIBERATION

A theology of justice begins with an examination of two theological topics which are regulative for the development of that theology. These two determinative topics are the foci around which a theology of justice will revolve in order to establish its legitimacy. The first of these foci is an anthropology. An anthropology defines human nature with its limitations and possibilities. The second focus is that of soteriology: God's saving agency and presence. This second topic deals with the modification or influence which divine agency has upon human nature and agency. Niebuhrian and Liberation theology find themselves in both agreement and conflict concerning the content of these two topics. It is the purpose of this chapter and the following chapter, to assess these respective theologies concerning their positions on human and divine agency in life and history.

For both Niebuhrian and Liberation theology, these two theological concerns are crystalized in the significance of Jesus Christ. Within this chapter and the following chapter, reference will be made to the significance of Jesus Christ, but a detailed analysis of the differing christologies will not be made. This christological analysis will be provided in a subsequent chapter in which christology will be the exclusive theme.

It will be concern of this chapter to examine the topics relevant to human limitation and possibility. In chapter seven we will examine divine agency and presence. To pursue this end, Niebuhrian and Liberation theology will first be placed in dialectical comparison on the topics of anthropology and sin.

Anthropology

The initial definition of human nature is determinative in Liberation and Niebuhrian theology as regards the development and emphasis within their respective theologies. Niebuhr initially defines human nature as reflecting a dialectical tension between biological impulse and transcendent consciousness. Liberation theology takes a completely different starting place. Liberation theology initially understands human nature as that which is defined by a socio-political context. Because of this initial decision, Liberation theology understands human nature to be fundamentally social rather than individual. Leonardo Boff is representative of this initial commitment of defining the human being as primarily social in nature.

> ...the social dimension of the human being is ontologically rooted in the very core of the human being as a person. It does not arise after the individual dimension. It is not merely the sum of various juxtaposed individuals who happen to form a community or society. It is not a mere byproduct that is reducible to a more basic reality. Ontologically speaking, we can say that the social dimension is fundamental. It exists prior to the will of individuals or their encounter with each other. It is a structural reality that helps constitute the human person. Either a person is social or is not a person at all. ... Individualism is a false understanding of the human being. The ego is always inhabited by others. The individual is always an abstraction. In concrete reality the person always shows up as a complicated web of active relationships.[1]

This emphasis on the social dimension of human nature makes us aware of the role of society in human fulfilment. Ismael García identifies this significance of society in contrast to a more instrumental conception.

> The individualistic understanding of human society must be transformed into a more relational and social view of individuality. Our vision of society must be transformed from an instrumental concept of the social -- society as the place from which we derive necessary goods and services -- to a more substantive notion of the social -- society as part of what it means to live a life worthy of the name *human*.[2]

The other side of this same insight concerning the social dimension of human nature is that society is determinative in the development of human individuality. Juan Luis Segundo is representative in this regard.

> From the very beginning of a man's life, even within the private and affective relations of the nuclear family, a culture is being transmitted to him. He encounters the norms, values, and behaviour patterns that form the basis of a consensus which makes societal life possible and orderly. From the very beginning of man's life, he is being brought into relationship with all of society -- in a way that is no less real for being indirect.[3]

In like manner, Boff states;

> The social dimension is not something added later to the human person. It pervades the human person and is a constituent element of the latter. In the form of institutions, values, forms of organization and power, it has its own independent density.[4]

This recognition of the relationship between the human individual and the social context leads Liberation theology to reject any concept of human nature which is static or fixed *a piori*. García claims that human beings can not be identified according to definitive relational qualities such as egoism or altruism. But must be understood in regard to the social order which determines human behaviour.

> Liberation theologians assume that significant social changes within the socioeconomic and political structures of society have consequences on who we become as persons, i.e., for the formation of our characters. The communities we belong to have a determining influence in shaping who we are. They structure our behaviour and reinforce beliefs and value systems. There is no such thing as a fixed human nature. Persons cannot be defined as being egoistic or altruistic by nature. By nature people are not driven by the uncontrollable desire for social gain nor by the saintly virtue of self-sacrifice. Selfishness, egoism, the unrestrained desire to acquire and accumulate or consume are characteristics all persons share in different degrees as are the virtues of caring and feeling for others. These are practices, however, that a given social system encourages or discourages. People can change. The possibility of changing is very much determined by changes within the social order.[5]

While García emphasises the role of social context in determining human personality, he does recognize that there is a dialectical relationship

between the social structure and the individual. It is not simply the case that social change will result in individual change. "Social change by itself does not create a new person, in the same way that transforming persons does not automatically induce a new social order".[6]

This emphasis on the social dimension of human nature places Liberation theology in both agreement and contrast with Niebuhrian theology. As we have already observed in relation to Feminist critique,[7] the Niebuhrian position tends to emphasize individuality because of its existential analysis of human nature. Niebuhr's concern with the dialectical relationship between organic impulse and transcendence leads him to focus much of his analysis around individual dimensions of human life. His most substantial analysis of social reality revolves around the egoistic behaviour of groups. His seeming lack of breadth in social analysis is due to his concern to underscore the insight that social injustice has its origin in human nature. Niebuhrian theology disagrees with García that human beings cannot be defined as being egoistic or altruistic by nature. Rather, for Niebuhrian theology, the human situation is complicated by the insight that human beings are both egoistic and altruistic by nature. This is not to say that Niebuhrian theology claims a static or fixed human nature. But rather that egoism and altruism are present in varying degrees in all human beings and that there is no point where these emotive sources are transparent to analysis. This does not deny the insight that the socio-political context modifies behaviour, it rather qualifies the impression that human nature is too simply malleable by a social context.

In principle, Niebuhrian theology does not disagree with the assertion of Liberation theology that human beings are fundamentally social. Niebuhr understands that individuality is grounded in a social context which makes it possible and that it returns to the social context to find fulfilment.

> The highest reaches of individual consciousness and awareness are rooted in social experience and find their ultimate meaning in relation to the community. The individual is the product of the whole socio-historical process, though he may reach a height of uniqueness which seems to transcend his social history completely.

> His individual decisions and achievements grow into, as well as out of, the community and find their final meaning in the community.[8]

This necessary social dimension of human nature finds it ultimate expression in Niebuhr's "law of love".

> The self is so created in freedom that it cannot realize itself within itself. It can only realize itself in loving relation to its fellows. Love is the law of its being.[9]

In this manner we see that although Niebuhr may not have considered in detail the social dimensions which are of primary concern to Liberation theology, Niebuhrian theology is not in principle contrary to it. Rather, Niebuhrian theology seeks a dialectical balance between individuality and social dimensions of human life.

A second anthropological concern of Liberation theology is that of human creativity. In continuity with an understanding of human nature as socially and historically malleable, is the assertion that the human being is creative in relation to its world and to its self. As García states; "Persons constitute themselves as persons not only in the process of dominating nature but also and mainly in the process of creating a more humane and just world".[10] Thus, human beings create themselves as they create their world. For Gustavo Gutiérrez this is fundamental to an understanding of the human being as a historical being.

> History, contrary to essentialist and static thinking, is not the development of potentialities preexistent in man; it is rather the conquest of new, qualitatively different ways of being a man in order to achieve an ever more total and complete fulfilment of the individual in solidarity with all mankind.[11]

Boff identifies this historic creativity as the 'fundamental project' of the human being. This project is one of continual creative synthesis.

> ... a human being is one who lives by fashioning an ongoing synthesis of all that it finds and thus fashions its own world. The life of a human being is a oneness of meaning, a history. There may be breaking points and ruptures, but they can always be taken up in a new synthesis. Taken individually, the actions of a

> human life both concretize and reveal the unity of a person's life.[12]

In this manner, Boff understands human nature to be dialectically creative in the realization of a life project. For Boff, human creativity corresponds to an understanding of human nature and historical existence which is fundamentally open-ended.

> The future of human beings cannot be deduced from their abstract, metaphysical essence; it is open-ended. They are no longer defined in terms of what they are and have already done. Instead they are seen in terms of what they can be, what they have not yet done or experienced but might possibly in the future.[13]

On the whole, Niebuhrian theology agrees with Liberation theology concerning the creative potential in human beings. Niebuhr affirms that human beings are both creatures as well as creators of history. As creatures subject to finitude and limitation, human beings are the product of historical forces and particular social environments. At the same time, human beings can obtain a degree of transcendence over history and culture, and thereby they can be agents in the creation of history. Where Niebuhrian theology differs with Liberation theology is concerning the degree to which human beings can create and modify themselves. As with the above disagreement with García, Niebuhrian theology has difficulty following Boff in his optimism concerning human nature in regard to an open future. For Niebuhrian theology, there are specific aspects of human nature which are definitive and which will always mitigate the aspirations of any life project. This disagreement will become more apparent when we view the topic of sin.

A third general concern of Liberation theology is the recognition of the human being as a spiritual self. In this regard, Niebuhrian and Liberation theology stand in agreement. Both reject any body-soul dualism which too simply reduces spirituality to an other-worldly hope. Both also perceive reason to be limited in regard to the transcendent quality of spirit. And most importantly, both basically follow Augustine in the recognition that there is a fundamental yearning for God within all human beings. Boff is representative of this anthropological position.

> The spirit is the whole human being, its mode of being insofar as it is living transcendence, total openness, and all-around relationship. Humanity as spirit signifies a yearning for the Infinite, a longing for God. Nothing in this world and no one by his or her humanity alone can claim to offer fulfilment. Human beings do not want just this or that. They do not ponder just this or that reality. They want everything and they contemplate totality. Only God seems to be the satisfactory pole toward which their interior compass points. Only in God will they find rest. Their natural desire to love God is rooted in the very depths of their being.[14]

This basic understanding of human spirituality corresponds to that of Niebuhr.

> This essential homelessness of the human spirit is the ground of all religion: for the self which stands outside itself and the world cannot find the meaning of life in itself or the world.[15]

> The human spirit cannot be held within the bounds of either natural necessity or rational prudence. It its yearning toward the infinite lies the source of both human creativity and human sin.[16]

> The fact that man can transcend himself in infinite regression and cannot find the end of life except in God is the mark of his creativity and uniqueness;...[17]

Where Niebuhrian and Liberation theology differ, concerning human spirituality, is the development and growth of this spirituality within a historical practice. Niebuhr tends to emphasize the transcendent existential quality of spirituality while Liberation theology emphasizes temporal transcendence in relation to the future. One criticism already noted, is that Niebuhrian theology does not provide a functional spirituality capable of being lived out in history.[18] This criticism will be further pursued under the topic of spirituality.

The above analysis, of general anthropological differences and similarities in Niebuhrian and Liberation theologies, provides an introduction and foundation for the examination of specific topics. The first topic of major concern to both theologies is the role of sin in human life and history.

Sin

Liberation theology understands sin to be a relational, social, and structural phenomenon. Liberation theology is not concerned with metaphysical discourse concerning the existence of sin. Rather, it is concerned with sin as historical phenomenon. García observes that; "Liberation theologians concern themselves with the reality of sinfulness not in its pure or disembodied form, the general condition of sinfulness all humans share in, but as it becomes manifest in specific or concrete forms".[19]

From this perspective, sin is first and foremost a relational phenomenon. As a relational phenomenon it is a refusal to love. This refusal results in alienation between God and human beings and in alienation among human beings. As Gutiérrez states; "Insofar as it constitutes a break with God, sin is a historical reality, it is a breach of the communion of men with each other, it is a turning in of man on himself which manifests itself in a multifaceted withdrawal from others".[20] This refusal to love and breach of communion manifests itself in two ways. The first is what Enrique Dussel calls the totalization of the self.

> Sin, all sin, is by nature a totalization. When we sin, we think we are all that there is and are therefore divine. We deny the Other and believe that our own totalized order is the kingdom of Heaven.[21]

This totalization also includes the denial of the human being as an 'other' with whom we stand in relationship.

The second form of sin which results in alienation and the breach of communion of human beings among themselves is what Gutiérrez calls the 'sin of omission'. This sin involves not so much the totalization of the self but rather the withdrawal of the self from involvement in the conflict of social life. "The cowardice that keeps silent in the face of the sufferings of the poor and that offers any number of adroit justifications represents an especially serious failure of Latin American Christians".[22] García also recognizes that the poor and

powerless are responsible for this form of sin. "The poor and powerless however are also responsible insofar as they tolerate and remain complacent with the status quo".[23]

This understanding of sin as a relational breach occasioned by totalization or withdrawal is applicable on the social level as well as the individual. García states; "Collective sin also represents a fixation upon self, an act of disregard for the other in need".[24] For Liberation theology, collective sin is manifest in the relationship between wealthy nations of the North Atlantic and the poor nations of the world. This sin takes the form of economic and technological dependency. Boff is explicit concerning the consequences of this collective sin.

> From the standpoint of faith, the situation of dependence and underdevelopment that characterizes our continent cannot help but be seen as an enormous social and structural sin. The symptoms of dependence are clear and inescapable: hunger, infant mortality, endemic diseases, cheap manual labour, deteriorating pay scales, abandonment of the schools by young people who must help their families eke out a living, a lack of participation and freedom, an inability to gain recognition of the most basic human rights, political corruption, and control of the nation's wealth by a small but powerful elite. Such a situation produces an inhumane way of life, and marginalization prevents people from being real human beings.[25]

Liberation theology understands that this relational and collective sin becomes institutionalized in the political structures and economic systems of a society. In this way sin is manifest in its most comprehensive and concrete form. Gutiérrez sums up our examination of sin to this point.

> Sin is present in the denial that a human being is sister or brother to me. It is present in structures of oppression, created for the benefit of a few. It is present in the spoliation of peoples, cultures, and social classes. Sin is the basic alienation. For that very reason, sin cannot be touched in itself, in the abstract. It can be attacked only in concrete historical situations -- in particular instances of alienation. Apart from particular, concrete alienation, sin is meaningless and incomprehensible.[26]

Niebuhrian theology is in basic agreement with this understanding of sin. As Niebuhr states;

> The religious dimension of sin is man's rebellion against God, his effort to usurp the place of God. The moral and social dimension of sin is injustice. The ego which falsely makes itself the centre of existence in its pride and will-to-power inevitably subordinates other life to its will and thus does injustice to other life.[27]

Niebuhrian theology not only agrees with Liberation theology concerning its assessment of collective or social sin, but claims that this manifestation of sin is more ruthless than that of individual sin.

> ...the pretensions and claims of a collective or social self exceed those of the individual ego. The group is more arrogant, hypocritical, self-centred and more ruthless in the pursuit of its ends than the individual.[28]

A modified Niebuhrian theology is also in agreement with Liberation theology concerning sin as totalization and withdrawal. Niebuhr's analysis of pride easily corresponds to Dussel's statement concerning the totalization of the self. But in contrast, Niebuhr's understanding of sensuality does not correspond to Gutiérrez or García's perception of sin as withdrawal or complacency. This same issue was addressed above in the Feminist critique of Niebuhr's concept of sensuality.[29] The same analysis and result can be applied here. While Niebuhr neglects the dimension of sin as self-deprivation or withdrawal, it is not alien to his dialectic. An expanded understanding of the loss of freedom experienced in sensuality leads to the same position held by Liberation theologians. In other words, sin is expressed in the giving up of freedom through avoidance and withdrawal. This expression of egoistic behaviour is an attempt to protect the self in a context of conflict and risk. Ironically it is also a loss of self and a refusal to love.

Another point of agreement between Liberation theology and Niebuhrian theology concerns the recognition that there are varying degrees of responsibility regarding the sin of social injustice. García claims that the rich and powerful have greater responsibility in this sin.

> It is possible to argue that the rich and powerful have greater responsibility since they determine policies and do so because it benefits them. They struggle very hard to keep things as they are.[30]

Niebuhr makes this same observation when he perceives that while sin may be equally present in all, guilt is not equal.

> ...men who are equally sinners in the sight of God need not be equally guilty of a specific act of wrong-doing in which they are involved. ...the men who are tempted by their eminence, and by the possession of undue power, become more guilty of pride and of injustice than those who lack power and position.[31]

In spite of differences of emphasis and analytical language, Niebuhrian and Liberation theology are in general agreement concerning the manifestation of sin. Where we encounter conflict between these respective theologies concerns the origin or inception of sin, and correspondingly, the solution or mitigation of sin.

The origin or inception of sin in human life is problematic for Liberation theology. Liberation theology wants to avoid metaphysical language and at the same time present a cosmology infused with grace. This leaves them with a problem concerning the existence of evil and the inception of sin in human history. There is little consensus in Liberation theology concerning this problem. Boff approaches this problem by renaming evil as 'dis-grace' in contradistinction to grace. For Boff there is no explanation for the presence of dis-grace. It is a fact which must be simply accepted.

> Dis-grace is absolute absurdity, sheer darkness without a trace of light. It has no rationale. There is no logical argument for dis-grace and sin, which cannot be understood in any way. Dis-grace is a brute fact, which can only be realized. It forces itself upon us as the absurd, and yet it exists as a fact and an experience.[32]

Where Boff agrees with other theologians is in the insight that the dis-grace and sin of individuals is tied up with the dis-grace and sin of society. In this regard, the individual's life project is caught up in the project of a particular culture. It is in this social context that Dussel wants to locate the inception of sin in human life.

Dussel understands sin to be transmitted through culture and that sin in the individual human life is the result of cultural conditioning.

> Original sin is transmitted through the ontological constitution of our being in the course of our education. On the day the child is taken from the uterus, it is not in the kingdom but neither is it condemned. The child has the potentiality of being a person, but by adolescence is already in the kingdom of sin because cultural formation has taken place within the institutions of injustice. ... The sin of the world is the sin of the flesh, and the sin of the flesh is likewise transmitted through cultural conditioning.[33]

Segundo takes a similar approach to sin but identifies it with various forms of inertia caused by both psychobiological and social determinisms. This inertia is the cause of the various forms of alienation in human life.[34] In this manner, Segundo locates the inception of sin in both nature and in the social environment.

Gutiérrez looks for the inception of sin in the weakness of biological, finite life of the self. Gutiérrez utilizes Pauline language and text to place the inception of sin in the 'flesh'. The term 'flesh' has a variety of definitions ranging from 'material, corporal, carnal creature', to 'human self-sufficiency'. Gutiérrez understands that the 'flesh' is weak because it is mortal, limited, and finite. He understands that it is this weakness inherent in the 'flesh' which makes human beings liable to be snared by sin. In even stronger terms he claims that this 'flesh' is a force of evil that lays hold of human beings.

> We have here another aspect or nuance in the complete idea of 'flesh'. This aspect is undoubtedly linked to the others but it is also distinct from them within what I have been calling the gamut or range of meanings. Flesh comes on the scene here as a force for evil that lays hold of human beings and subjects them to its own desires ...[35]

This force of the 'flesh' is not understood to be strictly determinative in relation to the inception of sin. Gutiérrez understands that human beings act in freedom and thus sin is a combination of this inherent weakness in the 'flesh' and a result of human decision. "The flesh is thus seen as power that acts upon human

beings and that with their complicity -- a combination of weakness and culpable acceptance -- brings them into the kingdom of death".[35]

What all these theologians have in common is their desire to place the origin or inception of sin somewhere other than in the human spirit. Dussel places it in social environment, Segundo locates it in the inertias of the social environment and the psychobiological dimension of the self, Gutiérrez places it in weakness of the flesh, and Boff restricts himself to the recognition of its empiric existence. Of these theologians, Gutiérrez comes near to placing the inception of sin in human spirit when he defines 'flesh' as the dimension of human self-sufficiency. But all through his analysis there is distinction as well as continuity between the material, biological, and finite dimension of 'flesh' and its more transcendent aspects.

By making sin a weakness or an identifiable inertia which has its inception outside the human spirit, Liberation theology too easily seems to reduce sin to a rectifiable fault rather than an ambiguous distortion of the self at the very height of human spiritual realization. It is concerning this issue that Niebuhrian theology is in stark contrast to Liberation theology. Niebuhr places the inception of sin in the transcendent dimension of human nature. For Niebuhr sin is realized in the freedom of the human spirit. While he recognizes that finiteness and mortality are limitations which are the source of anxiety in the human, these realities are only the occasion for sin and not the cause. Sin lies in human imagination and freedom which seeks to resolve this anxiety by means of pretension. "Man ... is a sinner not because he is one limited individual within a whole but rather because he is betrayed, by his very ability to survey the whole, to imagine himself the whole".[36] This difference between Liberation theology and Niebuhrian theology will become explicit as we consider the resolution or mitigation of sin in the following chapter.

The significance of sin for a theology of justice

This difference on the position of sin is not a minor one. While there are many points at which Liberation theology and Niebuhrian theology are in agreement, or differ in emphasis rather than substance, there is a fundamental difference on the origin and inception of sin which will continually be a point of contention. Liberation theology perceives sin as a fault or as a rectifiable determinism. Niebuhrian theology perceives sin in the very depth and height of human spirituality. For Niebuhr, sin is a corruption which permeates the self in all its dimensions. This fundamental difference in anthropology becomes the determining factor in how these respective theologies identify the values of justice and choose the ways and means to implement these values in social, economic, and political, structures and systems. The question which this difference raises is whether Liberation theology has embraced a conception of sin which leads to an optimistic anthropology which is lacking in realism. But the question can also be put to Niebuhrian theology whether its realism is overly pessimistic. These questions can not be answered until we have considered the agency of God as one who mitigates or resolves the power of sin. This will be our concern in the next chapter.

NOTES

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17. Ibid., page 131.
18. See above page 93.
19. García, op. cit., page 91.
20. Gutiérrez, op. cit., page 152.
21. Enrique Dussel, *Ethics and the Theology of Liberation*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1978, page 17.
22. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1984, page 97.
23. García, op. cit., page 91.
24. Ibid.
25. Boff, op. cit., pages 84 and 85.
26. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1983, page 62.
27. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. I, op. cit., page 191.
28. Ibid., pages 221 and 222.
29. See above pages 84 - 86.
30. García, op. cit., page 91.
31. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. I, op. cit., pages 236 and 237.
32. Boff, op. cit., page 4.
33. Dussel, op. cit., pages 25 and 26.
34. Segundo, op. cit., page 37.
35. Gutiérrez, *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, op. cit., page 58.
36. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. I, op. cit., page 17.

7. SALVATION AS LIBERATION

In the preceding chapter we examined anthropology and sin as determining factors in understanding the limits and possibilities of human agency. This examination is incomplete without a thorough understanding of divine agency and its effect in transforming these same limits and possibilities. This transforming quality of the divine encounter with human beings we will designate as 'salvation-liberation'. In this assessment of the position of Liberation theology we will begin by examining the general themes of salvation-liberation.

The event of salvation-liberation is apprehended in Liberation theology within the framework of three interrelated theological themes; a cosmology of grace, salvation history, and eschatological promise. These three themes indicate different dimensions of the unity of divine grace in salvation-liberation. An assessment of these themes precedes the examination of the event or process of salvation-liberation as an individual or collective experience.

General themes of salvation-liberation

As mentioned in the previous chapter, liberation theologians seek to place their understanding of sin and salvation within the context of a cosmology of grace. Gustavo Gutiérrez and Leonardo Boff are forceful proponents of this position. In this cosmology, God is immanent in the world and in human beings as grace. For Boff, God is not outside the world or above the world, but at the very core of the world. In this manner grace is to be understood as the ontological foundation of the cosmos. "... in the light of the ultimate foundation, God, everything is grace because everything is referred back to him, sustained and supported ontologically by him".[1] This means that human beings live in what Boff describes as a *divine milieu* of grace. Grace is present in everything and nothing can escape its influence.[2]

For both Boff and Gutiérrez this means that the divine is universalized and present in all human beings. Christology plays an important role in this universalizing of the presence of God. As Gutiérrez states;

> Since God has become man, humanity, every man, history, is the living temple of God. The 'pro-fane,' that which is located outside the temple, no longer exists.[3]

In this cosmology, grace appears as a teleological force underlying all reality. Yet the presence of grace is not strictly determinative concerning human beings. In this cosmology, human beings can exercise freedom whereby they can resist this teleological force. Yet even this freedom is seen to be a potential provided in God's grace. In this manner, even human rebellion reveals the gracious foundation of reality.

According to Gutiérrez and Boff, this sin of rebellion is unequal to the presence of grace in human beings. Gutiérrez uses the terms 'flesh' and 'spirit' to describe the antithesis between the selfish, death-dealing principle in human beings and the life-giving presence of the divine in human beings. For Gutiérrez this antithesis is unequal in favour of the 'spirit'. While 'flesh' is a principle of weakness and passivity in the human being, the 'spirit' is the presence of the vitality of the divine person.[4] Boff takes this same position in his antithesis between grace and dis-grace. For him, grace is always victorious over dis-grace. "The human capacity for rejecting God and sinning is never the equal of God's offering of grace".[5]

In Liberation theology, sin appears to be an aberration in a cosmos infused by grace. And this aberration appears to have its locus in the human being for reasons considered in the previous chapter. For Boff this means that evil has no cosmological or ontological dimension.

> In the ontological dimension of reality no action is bad in itself, for it depends of God. Evil appears only in the moral dimension. Created freedom is summoned to dialogue. It is created and hence dependent and imperfect. It can choose freely to withdraw itself from its dependence on the divine. It cannot do so ontologically because it can never exist without God. But in its freedom it can will the impossible, and that is sin ...[6]

Niebuhrian theology embraces a cosmology which stands in contrast to the cosmology of grace as proposed by Liberation theology. Niebuhr's criticism of naturalistic monism apples to the cosmology of Liberation theology. He claimed that the naturalistic monism of modern culture was possible because the ethical character of the forces of nature is overestimated.[7] For this reason Niebuhrian theology resists understanding grace as a teleological force underlying reality which is transparent to interpretation. This is not to say that Niebuhrian theology fails to recognize theological significance in the forces of nature. Niebuhr apprehended in the cosmos an impartiality rather than a teleological force. This impartiality in nature reveals both divine mercy and divine judgement. The fact that rain falls on the crops of the good and bad alike is a revelation of divine mercy as a cosmic dimension. But in the same manner, the winter storm that destroys both the good and the bad alike reveals judgement over against all human pretension and pride.[8] It is this element of judgement which calls into question a teleological interpretation of the cosmos. From the Niebuhrian perspective, Liberation theology over-emphasizes mercy as a cosmological determinant and restricts judgement to the socio-political dimension.

This difference in cosmology also applies to the issue of cosmological evil. Niebuhr understands the myth of the devil as a recognition that evil has a cosmological dimension.[9] This would mean that sin is not strictly a human perversion, but that the evil in human beings has continuity with a corresponding cosmological dimension. What is at stake in this cosmological difference is the optimism of Liberation theology that results from perceiving human sin as a rectifiable anomaly in an otherwise 'gracious' cosmos. This optimism obtains even though Liberation theology recognizes that sin is ultimately rectified by divine eschatological transformation of the human being. Niebuhrian theology rejects this tendency toward optimism concerning human nature or the cosmos. For Niebuhrian theology the human being and the cosmos contain elements which are constitutive of evil.

Within the context of this ambiguous cosmos, Niebuhrian theology also questions Liberation theology concerning its perception of the

transparency of the divine in human beings. Niebuhrian theology does not disagree with a universal divine immanence in human life. It rather questions that this immanence is so easily apparent. Niebuhr understands that at best we may get a glimpse of this divine presence. "... Jesus finds glimpses of God, of pure spirit, of perfect love, in human nature, in the love of parents for their children, for instance, and in the innocency of little children; yet he also knew that out of the heart of this same human nature 'proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies' (Matt. 15:19)".[10]

For Niebuhrian theology, grace has a different meaning and emphasis compared with Liberation theology. Niebuhr understands grace to be first and foremost the forgiveness of sins extended from God to human beings. Only then does grace become a power within human life. In this understanding, grace is not an element constitutive of the self, but is forgiveness and a power which comes to the human self from beyond the self. In the context of forgiveness, the human being apprehends the continuing sin of the self and the perfect love of God which forgives in spite of sin. It is in this relationship that the human being receives resources of love, wisdom, and power which are operative as divine grace in human life. In this dual understanding of grace, the emphasis is on grace as an act of God whereby God completes what human beings can not complete.[11]

The second theological theme which provides the framework for the salvation-liberation event is that of salvation history. Liberation theology understands salvation-liberation to be fundamentally historical. Corresponding to the cosmology of grace, history is also grounded in divine agency and presence. For Gutiérrez and Boff, history is a unity of divine and human agency finding its meaning and end in Jesus Christ. In this way, Gutiérrez understands history to be process of human development.

> ... we do not have two juxtaposed histories, one sacred and the other profane. There is only one single process of human development, definitively and irreversibly assumed by Christ, the Lord of history.[12]

In this historical process, Gutiérrez understands humanity to be fulfilling the single vocation of all humanity to salvation. This salvation is the convocation of all humanity to communion with God and community with one another. Thus, for Gutiérrez, salvation is an intrahistorical reality which orients, transforms, and guides history to its fulfillment.[13]

According to Gutiérrez, this salvation history has its inception at creation. In the event of creation God actualizes the divine intention of salvation. For Gutiérrez, salvation and creation are two ways of describing the one historical process. The paradigmatic model for this process is the Exodus story. In the Exodus event we perceive the overriding will of God and the free consent of human beings resulting in the creation of a historic liberation of Hebrew slaves. Gutierrez understands Israel's history to be the prolongation of God's ongoing creative agency. Correspondingly, he understands contemporary salvation to also be a continuation of this same creativity. God continues to create and human beings continue to choose to participate in this salvific historic activity of creation. In this way human beings enter into the process of salvation and become agents in the salvation of the world.[14]

For Gutiérrez, this process of historical liberation has its focus in reference to a particular social group. This social group is composed of the strata of society who are oppressed, despoiled, and alienated. It is these human beings who bear the meaning of history and who mediate the historical salvation of humanity.

> The future of history belongs to the poor and exploited. True liberation will be the work of the oppressed themselves; in them, the Lord saves history.[15]

Boff also understands salvation history as a process of human liberation. In his understanding of the historical process he distinguishes the terms 'liberation' and 'salvation'. These terms contain distinct as well as common meaning. Salvation refers to the eschatological condition of the human being which is full and complete in eternity. Liberation, in its distinctive meaning, is the historical anticipation and concretization of salvation. Thus, historical

liberations are always grounded in the ultimate salvific intention of God and eschatological salvation is the final and full liberation. With this understanding, salvation is a transhistorical reality as well as within the historical process.[16]

For Boff, history is the creation of the free agency of human beings and therefore can be a history of salvation or of perdition. As a history of salvation it is a history wherein human beings embrace the grace of God offered in the pervasive *divine milieu*. God's love "...invites all to undertake a journey where God and human beings unite to make history. This is the history of salvation, the fruit of two freedoms at work and the product of two loves".[17] In the same way history can be a history of perdition, the rejection of God's love and the rejection of human community. As with Gutiérrez, Boff understands this history to be one history. Perdition and salvation are the two potential directions which history can take under human agency. It is human agency which brings grace into history. "The grace of God becomes history in the history of love at work in the world".[18] But Boff also understands that historical liberation, the actualization of grace in history, never fully achieves a history of salvation free from perdition. This full salvation is an eschatological reality.

> By reason of sin, liberation is never full and complete: it always carries a quota of oppression. Salvation is total liberation, and thereby it is salvation fully achieved -- completely unsullied and pure, never again to be threatened.[19]

Yet this admission of the inevitable presence of sin does not affect salvation as a teleological force underlying history.

> What ought to be has a power of its own, and no one can keep it down. Some day justice will overcome, and historical grace will bear its full fruit in the midst of human beings.[20]

Once again we find Niebuhrian theology to be in stark contrast to Liberation theology concerning the immanence of God. Niebuhr understands grace and salvation to have their origin and realization beyond the obscurities and contradictions of history. Grace and salvation are not epistemologically available in either nature or history. Rather, the meaningfulness of history is disclosed by a God

who is 'hidden'.[21] It is in this context that Niebuhr understands history as *Heilsgeschichte* or salvation history. Salvation history is not the process of liberation within a teleological *divine milieu*. It is rather the revelation of the meaning of history (telos) and of the ultimate fulfilment of history at its end (finis).[22] For Niebuhr, the perennial presence of sin in human history defies an interpretation of history as a process guided by a salvific teleological force. He understands sin to be overcome in principle, but not in fact. This is not to say that Niebuhr disregards the role of love as a transforming power in history. It is rather to qualify the possibilities of love.

> The love which enters history as suffering love, must remain suffering love in history. Since this love is the very law of history it may have its tentative triumphs even in history; for human history cannot stand in complete contradiction to itself. Yet history does stand in actual contradiction to the law of love; and Jesus anticipates the growth of evil as well as the growth of good in history.[23]

It is for these reasons that Niebuhrian theology rejects the panoramic view of salvific-creative history proposed by Gutiérrez. For Niebuhr, the inner contradictions of history do not allow for a continuity of salvific-creative fulfilment. The only fulfilment that Niebuhr perceives in present history is that which occurs in the moment when human beings establish themselves in relation to God through contrition and faith. This is not to deny the creative potential of human agency in history. Niebuhrian theology agrees with Boff's distinction between historical liberation and eschatological salvation. The difference is that Niebuhr would place historical liberation in dialectical relation to final salvation, rather than in teleological relation. For Niebuhr, the eschatological salvation accomplished by God will always reveal historical liberations as human approximations which inevitably contain dimensions of self-regard and will-to-power. For this reason, Niebuhrian theology is critical of the perception that human agency in historical liberation is directly in continuity with divine agency and will. This is not to reject the ethical demand of human agency in historical liberation. It is rather a rejection of the tendency to justify and universalize the values of a historical project

in terms of divine will in disregard for the perennial tendency in human beings to self-deception and pride.

> ... so long as the self, individual or collective, remains within the tensions of history and is subject to the twofold condition of involvement in process and transcendence over it, it will be subject to the sin of over-estimating its transcendence and of compounding its interests with those which are more inclusive.[24]

It is for this same reason that Niebuhrian theology is critical of Gutiérrez when he claims that the poor and oppressed will be the mediators and agents of historical salvation. This is not to say that the presence of the poor is without theological significance or that groups in society are incapable of being agents of social change and achieving an improved state of affairs. It is rather to resist the temptation to locate in any social group a moral authority free from self-regard and will-to-power.

> A too simple social radicalism does not recognize how quickly the poor, the weak, the despised of yesterday, may, on gaining a social victory over their detractors, exhibit the same arrogance and the same will-to-power which they abhorred in their opponents and which they were inclined to regard as a congenital sin of their enemies. Every victim of injustice makes the mistake of supposing that the sin from which he suffers is a peculiar vice of his oppressor. This is the self-righteousness of the weak as distinct from the self-righteousness of the powerful;...[25]

This brings us to consider the third general theme which forms the context for the event of salvific encounter. In continuity with the theme of salvation history is the theme of the culmination of that history in the Kingdom of God. It is the Kingdom of God which is understood as the eschatological promise which gives history its meaning and direction. This Kingdom of God is the fulfilment of God's love and sovereignty in the realization of life and community liberated from sin and death. This is the primary theme in Liberation theology. As Gutiérrez states;

> ...the Bible presents eschatology as the driving force of salvific history radically oriented toward the future. Eschatology is thus not just one more element of Christianity, but the very key to understanding the Christian faith.[26]

At the outset it must be stated that Liberation theologians do not claim that this eschatological Kingdom is to be simply identified with particular historical liberations. Yet different Liberation theologians perceive the proximity between eschatological promise and historical liberation in varying intensity. Leonardo Boff presents us with a strong sense of continuity in his understanding of history as process. "The Kingdom, although not of this world in its origin -- it comes from God -- is nevertheless among us, manifesting itself in processes of liberation".[27] This manifestation of the Kingdom is immanent in history and continually being realized in particular liberations. "Liberations show forth the activity of eschatological salvation by anticipation, as the leaven of today in the dough of a reality fully to be transfigured in the eschaton".[28]

In like manner, Gustavo Gutiérrez understands the eschatological promise as an intrahistorical reality which is being fulfilled in human history.

> The Promise is revealed, appeals to man, and is fulfilled throughout history. The Promise orients all history toward the future and thus puts revelation in an eschatological perspective. Human history is in truth nothing but the history of the slow, uncertain, and surprising fulfilment of the Promise.[29]

Yet Gutiérrez also understands this eschatological promise to stand in dialectical tension with historical liberations. He maintains that this eschatological orientation towards the future indicates an openess and creative newness of God's activity in history. Thus, there is a continual tension between the various realizations of the promise in historical liberations and the novelty and completeness of future liberation. "The Promise is gradually revealed in all its universality and concrete expression: it is *already* fulfilled in historical events, but *not yet* completely; it incessantly projects itself into the future, creating a permanent historical mobility".[30] For Gutiérrez, this dialectical tension is resolved in the complete encounter with God in history. It is this encounter which will mark the end of history.[31]

José Míguez Bonino differs from Boff and Gutiérrez in that he intensifies the dialectical relationship between history and the eschaton. He is concerned to avoid deifying history or humanity which

would result in a total immanentism. For this reason he embraces a dialectic which recognizes a distinct discontinuity as well as a continuity between history and the eschatological promise of the Kingdom. For him, the future indicates judgement as well as promise.

> ...I think we can posit a continuity-discontinuity between history and the kingdom of God which is of the same order as that between the earthly body and the resurrected body. Thus the kingdom of God is not the negation of history but rather the elimination of its frailty, corruptibility, and ambiguity. Going a bit more deeply we can say it is the elimination of history's sinfulness so that the authentic import of communitarian life may be realized. In the same way, then, historical 'works' take on permanence insofar as they anticipate this full realization. But in both cases all possibility of confusion is ruled out because the reality of judgement intervenes to divide and separate.
>
> ... The kingdom is not the natural outcome of history. Conflict and judgement intervene. Yet the kingdom does salvage, transform, and fulfil the 'corporality' of history and the dynamism of love and fellowship at work in it. This means that the eschatological reality, in turn, is fashioned, nurtured, and raised in history.[32]

In this manner, Míguez Bonino avoids an understanding of the Kingdom of God as an immanent 'final cause' which neglects the dimension of eschatological judgement. And yet at the same time he maintains an understanding of the Kingdom of God as promise and as a creative presence in history. His dialectic between judgement and promise allows him a qualified optimism concerning historical activity.

> In relation to the kingdom, history is not an enigma to be deciphered but a mission to be carried out. This mission, be it noted immediately, is not a mere ensemble of actions but the manifestation of a new reality -- of the new life that is offered and communicated in Christ and his Spirit. The first fruits of the Spirit are the *anticipation* of the kingdom. They are the quality of personal and collective existence that has a future, an eschatological reality, and that concentrates authentic history around its center.[33]

Niebuhrian theology also wants to maintain a continuity-discontinuity between history and the Kingdom of God. In this respect Niebuhrian theology is in conflict with Boff and Gutiérrez. For Niebuhr, the eschatological Kingdom is transhistorical rather than intrahistorical. As Niebuhr states; "... we must look forward to a

completion of life which is not in our power and is even beyond our comprehension".[34] For this reason Niebuhr understands history as an interim between the disclosure of the meaning of history in Christ and the fulfilment of history at the eschaton. This is not to say that Niebuhr understands the Kingdom of God as a norm which so transcends history as to be irrelevant to history. Niebuhr wants to avoid both extremes of placing the Kingdom too simply within history or placing it too external to history. Niebuhrian theology seeks to maintain a dialectic wherein both promise and judgement serve to inspire historical agency as well as reveal the self-regard and will-to-power which obscures the moral claims of all historical projects. It is in this regard that Niebuhrian theology is in agreement with Míguez Bonino. Their differences are more polemic than actual. Niebuhr emphasized the eschatological element of judgement to mitigate the optimism of Liberalism while Míguez Bonino emphasizes the eschatological element of promise in the face of poverty and despair. But both recognize the dialectical relationship between the two themes. Niebuhr's polemic concerns for an awareness of judgement should not obscure his cautious optimism concerning agency in history. In agreement with Míguez Bonino, Niebuhr understands the eschatological Kingdom of God to be a resource of love which is available for the creative transformation of history.

> All the characteristic hopes and aspirations of Renaissance and Enlightenment, of both secular and Christian liberalism, are right at least in this, that they understand that side of the Christian doctrine which regards the *agape* of the Kingdom of God as a resource for infinite developments towards a more perfect brotherhood in history.[35]

In these three themes of salvation-liberation; cosmology of grace, salvation history, and eschatology, we perceive the broad salvific context in which to understand the collective and individual experience of salvation. Now we turn to the specific salvific encounter realized in human experience and history.

The salvific encounter

Liberation theology describes the event of salvific encounter as one of integral liberation. This liberation is to be understood as permeating all levels of human existence. In commenting on the Puebla document, Boff states; "Integral liberation, as its name indicates, embraces all human dimensions; the personal, the social, the political, the economic, the cultural, the religious, 'and all their interrelationships'".[36] In our consideration of integral liberation realized in the salvific encounter, we will proceed by examination of three 'moments' of this encounter. These 'moments' are somewhat artificial in that they are abstractions of the one continual event of encounter. Yet they are helpful in analysing the specific movements in this encounter. These three 'moments' are initial encounter, conversion, and 'the new self'.

The moment of initial encounter is fundamentally an encounter with the purpose of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. In this encounter humanity is introduced to communion with God and with the rest of humanity as brothers and sisters. In this regard Gutiérrez states that Christ is to be understood as the new covenant.

> Jesus Christ is himself the new covenant. In him God becomes the Father of all nations, and all men and women see that they are his children and one another's sisters and brothers.[37]

The possibility of this encounter presupposes human freedom and agency. For Boff this means that this encounter is one of "filial dialogue" and the "history of two freedoms, the meeting of two loves".[38] For both Gutiérrez and Boff this means that the encounter with the divine involves an acceptance or rejection of God's presence and purpose in history. As Gutiérrez states; "Human existence, in the last instance, is nothing but a yes or no to the Lord...".[39] This 'yes or no' is not to be understood as merely cognitive assent, but is primarily a profound relational commitment which can function independently of religious knowledge. Gutiérrez states that, "... man is saved if he opens himself to God and to others, even if he is not clearly aware that he is doing so".[40] In like manner, Boff states that

salvation, "...is offered to all, and is appropriated by all through their respective moral praxis, independent of any reflexive awareness on the part of the agent of moral praxis that salvation or perdition is linked with that praxis...".[41]

For Liberation theologians this encounter with God has a specific locus in history. This locus is the presence of the poor and oppressed. Where Liberation theologians differ is the extent to which the poor and oppressed mediate the presence and purpose of God. Gutiérrez maintains a sacramental understanding of God's presence in human beings in general. He understands that since all humanity, each human being, is the living temple of God that therefore when we encounter other human beings we are encountering God.[42] He understands that the love of God and the love of neighbour are more than intimately related. To love the neighbour is to literally love God.

> It is not enough to say that love of God is inseparable from the love of one's neighbour. It must be added love for God is unavoidably expressed *through* love of one's neighbour. Moreover, God is loved in the neighbour... To love one's brother, to love all men, is a necessary and indispensable mediation of the love of God; it *is* to love God...[43]

This encounter with God in human beings finds a focal point in the poor and oppressed.

> We find the Lord in our encounters with men, especially the poor, marginated, and exploited ones. An act of love towards them is an act of love towards God.[44]

It is in the poor person that we encounter God. "The poor person, the other, becomes the revealer of the Utterly Other".[45] But poverty is not the quality which necessarily carries a divine dimension. Rather, poverty is the context wherein a desire for liberation is realized. This desire for liberation is the dimension wherein we encounter God. "...this is our aim and goal: an encounter with the Lord, not in the poor person who is 'isolated and good', but in the oppressed person, the member of a social class that burns with struggle for its most elemental rights and for the construction of a society in which persons can live as human beings".[46]

Gutiérrez understands this encounter with God in the poor as a dialectical event of self knowledge and knowledge of God. In this manner it is both an invitation to communion with God through the praxis of justice and also a crisis concerning our identity.

> To know God is to do justice, is to be in solidarity with the poor person. And it is to be in solidarity with that poor person as he or she actually exists today -- as someone who is oppressed, as a member of an exploited class, or ethnic group, or culture, or nation.
>
> At the same time, a relationship with God who has loved me -- loved me first and loved me freely -- despoils me, strips me. It universalizes my love for others and makes it gratuitous too. Each of the two movements demands the other, dialectically.[47]

Leonardo Boff also embraces a sacramental view of humanity with the poor and oppressed being the focus of the encounter with God. He differs from Gutiérrez in that the christological significance of the poor lies in their suffering. In this suffering Boff perceives the suffering of Christ.

> Historically, the eternal Son, in whom we are God's offspring (Eph. 2:10), became incarnate as the suffering Servant. Hence all the suffers of history are special sacraments of Jesus Christ, the suffering Servant. In them we find a deeper and more concentrated presence of Christ.[48]

Boff also differs from Gutiérrez in that he perceives the various dimensions of history to be sacramental and to have the potential to mediate an encounter with God. To answer 'yes or no' to the elements of God's design, be they economic, political, etc., is to answer 'yes or no' to God. Thus, for Boff, the salvific encounter is one wherein human beings either commit themselves to situations that contradict God's salvific design or to situations that are gradually conforming to that design.[49]

Like Gutiérrez, Boff also understands this encounter to be one of both invitation and crisis. It is an invitation because it offers new opportunity for growth. At the same time it is a crisis because it is a judgement on present existence.

> As crisis, grace also passes judgement on a human being. We must make a decision, snapping out of our lethargy and moving away from

> the things we had taken for granted in our life project. Like any crisis, this entails ruptures that can be painful. But it also offers a great opportunity to grow, to give new direction to our life, or to solidify our trust in the path we have already chosen.[50]

Ismael García does not follow Boff or Gutiérrez in their sacramental view of human beings, especially the incarnational significance of the poor and oppressed. Rather he understands that we encounter God when we commit ourselves to a praxis which embodies God's concern for the freedom and well-being of human beings.

> We encounter God in our commitment to forward the freedom and well-being of humanity. It is a privileged position to experience God as the enabler of new possibilities as well as the sustainer of what forwards life.[51]

It is within this divine concern for freedom and well-being that the poor and oppressed take on special significance. God is in solidarity with the poor and oppressed. "God is known and found amongst those who have no one to defend, forward and protect their well-being and freedom".[52] But these poor and oppressed do not take on significance because of incarnational or sacramental qualities. Rather, they are receiptient of God's preferential concern because of their need.

> God's preferential option for the poor is not a denial of divine love for the whole of humanity. The poor are not assured a place in God's kingdom because of the historical accident of their belonging to a given social class under particular socio-historical circumstances that made them disadvantaged and oppressed. Nor are the poor more virtuous in any morally and religiously significant way. God made the poor chosen ones just because they are poor, in spite of considerations of merit or lack of it. God does justice to the poor solely because they are in need and calls upon God's people to do the same.[53]

It is within this perspective that the poor are understood to have theological significance. The poor become a focal point of God's general concern for all humanity. In this way the liberation of the poor has significance which is inclusive of all human beings. The poor are also significant in that their presence indicates a quality of crisis in our encounter with God. The presence of the poor indicate that the promise of liberation is still unfulfilled. In this way they

become the 'other'; "The poor are the 'other', who call us to move beyond ourselves and make a commitment to the well-being of others".[54] In this manner García maintains that the poor are continually significant in our relationship with God without making a literal identification between God and the poor.

Niebuhr is both in agreement and disagreement with Liberation theology concerning the dynamics of this initial encounter with God. Niebuhr agrees with the Liberation assessment of human agency in the divine encounter. He understands that human beings must 'open the door', and are capable of doing so. Where he disagrees with Liberation theology is concerning the quality of this encounter. Niebuhr presents a heightened sense of crisis in his emphasis on divine transcendence and revealed judgement and mercy. He understands that Christ is the focus of this encounter which is confrontive in nature. In Christ is revealed God's judgement on sin and the mercy which triumphs over the divine wrath. In this confrontation the human self is shattered in that his or her sins are brought to consciousness and the real source and centre of life is revealed. At the same time, this encounter is a confrontation with divine grace and self-giving love which makes this consciousness bearable.[55]

It is concerning this issue of confrontation with divine mercy and judgement that Niebuhr disagrees with Boff and Gutiérrez. For Niebuhr, this encounter of judgement and mercy must have a transcendent quality. It can not be simply identified with any human group or social process. This is due to Niebuhr's understanding of sin and the transcendent quality of the self. For this reason judgement must ultimately come from beyond any socially contingent relationship.

> While all particular sins have both social sources and social consequences, the real essence of sin can be understood only in the vertical dimension of the soul's relation to God because the freedom of the self stands outside all relations, and therefore has no other judge but God.[56]

For this reason Niebuhrian theology rejects an incarnational or sacramental view of divine encounter in social movements or the poor. This is not to say that Niebuhr disregards any theological significance for the presence of the poor. Niebuhr understood that the prophetic

tradition was anti-aristocratic in favour of the poor and oppressed. For him, this anti-aristocratic tradition was significant in that it proclaimed God's judgement on the so-called 'good, mighty, noble, and wise'. In this way the presence of the poor became the occasion for revealing the pretension of the powerful.[57]

It is at this point that García's understanding of the role of the poor challenges Niebuhrian theology to broaden its perspective. Niebuhr emphasises the transcendent character of the divine encounter to the loss of immanent historical mediation. While rejecting a too simple understanding of the immanent divine presence in human persons or social movements, Niebuhrian theology can be seen to neglect the continuing theological significance of the presence of the poor. When the poor are seen to be the continuing and perennial occasion for the divine encounter of judgement and mercy, an intensity or 'crisis' is maintained which has both transcendent and immanent dimensions. This focus on the poor creates a historical immediacy which corresponds to the transcendent encounter in Christ. Both Christ and the poor become the occasion for the encounter with divine judgement and mercy. In this way a balance can be maintained between the trans-historical and the historical. García also understands that the poor are more than an occasion for encounter with divine judgement and mercy. They also represent invitation and opportunity. In this way the 'crisis' of encounter is not only that of confrontation with sin and divine forgiveness, it is also a 'crisis' which provides the opportunity for change, of self-giving, of the praxis of justice. This brings us to consider the next 'moment' in the encounter with God: conversion.

Gustavo Gutiérrez understands conversion to be a radical reorientation of the self; "Conversion means going out of oneself, being open to God and others; implies a break, but above all it means following a new path".[58] This new orientation is one wherein the self enters the divine circle of love.

> To be saved is to enter into the circle of charity which unites the three Persons of the Trinity; it is to love as God loves. The way to this fullness of love can be no other than love itself, the way of participation in this charity, the way of accepting, explicitly or implicitly, to say with the Spirit: 'Abba, Father' (Gal. 4:6).[59]

But this conversion is not to be understood as a purely 'interior' or subjective spiritual event. It is also a conversion to the neighbour who is also in this circle of love.

This conversion to God and the neighbour involves a reorientation of the self on several levels. On the level of cognition it requires what Liberation theologians call 'conscientization' or consciousness raising. Gutiérrez understands conscientization to involve both the oppressed and the oppressors. For the oppressed it means an awakening to the dynamics of the oppressive situation and the realization that the various values and perceptions held by the oppressors in this situation have been integrated into their own consciousness. For the oppressor it means an awakening to the part they have played in this oppressive society and that their lack of self-fulfilment is tied to the alienation prevalent in society as a whole which is revealed specifically in the poor and oppressed.[60] For this reason conversion means a break with how we have understood our world and our relationships to others.

A second level of this conversion involves a moral commitment to the world of the neighbour, especially the neighbour who is oppressed and poor. As Gutiérrez states;

> Rediscovering the other means entering his own world. It also means a break with ours. ... To enter the world of the other, the poor man, with the actual demands involved, is to begin to be a 'new man'. It is a process of conversion.[61]

This moral commitment has its impetus within the various understandings of the role of the poor already considered. Gutiérrez and Boff perceive this to be a commitment to Christ in the poor person. Gutiérrez exemplifies this position.

> Conversion means a radical transformation of ourselves; it means thinking, feeling, and living as Christ -- present in exploited and alienated man. To be converted is to commit oneself to the process of the liberation of the poor and oppressed, to commit oneself lucidly, realistically, and concretely.[62]

The position taken by García, rejecting the sacramental interpretation of the poor, is no less rigorous in its commitment to the world of the poor. In this all Liberation theology is in agreement. The commitment to God necessarily involves a commitment to the neighbour, and specifically the neighbour who is poor and oppressed with whom God is in solidarity.

The third level of this conversion process is necessitated by this commitment to the world of the poor. For Liberation theology, conversion must have social, political, and economic dimensions. As Gutiérrez states; "The change called for is not simply an interior one but one that involves the entire person as a corporal being ... and therefore also has consequences for the web of social relationships of which the individual is a part".[63] For Gutiérrez, conversion is not authentic if it lacks this social dimension.

> Our conversion process is affected by the socio-economic, political, cultural, and human environment in which it occurs. Without a change in these structures there is no authentic conversion. We have to break with our mental categories, with the way we relate to others, with our way of identifying with the Lord, with our cultural milieu, with our social class, in other words, with all that can stand in the way of a real, profound solidarity with those who suffer, in the first place, from misery and injustice.[64]

Boff also recognizes that this lack of the social dimension in conversion results in moral ambiguity.

> When Christians take cognizance of the link between the personal and the structural levels, they can no longer rest content with a conversion of the heart and personal holiness on the individual level. They realize that if they are to be graced personally, they must also fight to change the societal structure and open it up to God's grace. Insofar as the latter does not happen, their personal goodness will remain terribly ambiguous.[65]

Ismael García makes this same point when he observes that integral liberation achieves authentic reconciliation; "It (liberation) creates conditions for authentic reconciliation because it attempts to overcome those objective and subjective conditions that are obstacles to the concrete realization of mutuality".[66]

García approaches this social commitment from a different perspective. While Gutiérrez speaks of 'radical transformation' of the self and Boff speaks of 'personal holiness', García maintains the perennial sinfulness of human beings but distinguishes the sinful condition of humanity from the particular manifestations of sin.

> We can never overcome our sinful condition but we can and are called to overcome particular manifestations of human sinfulness. The universal and all-embracing character of sin does not make it impossible for humanity to improve its life in new and unexpected ways. God provides conditions for humanity to strive for the greater good rather than merely conform to the lesser evil. We are called to conversion, a conversion that has a social dimension. It demands our commitment to the creation of a more just world. We are not liberated from sin through the act of conversion but we are liberated to make a historical difference as witnesses of God's kingdom.[67]

Niebuhrian theology is in agreement with Liberation theology that conversion is an entering into the 'circle' of divine love. But Niebuhr emphasizes this as an existential experience wherein the self is embraced by the justifying grace of God. In this encounter the self is confronted by the transcendent relational ideal of self-giving love and is moved to repentance of the pretensions of the self. In this repentance the self finds itself understood and accepted in spite of its sin. For Niebuhr, this is the assurance of grace.

> All men who live with any degree of serenity live by some assurance of grace. In every life there must at least be times and seasons when the good is felt as a present possession and not as a far-off goal. The sinner must feel himself 'justified', that is, he must feel that his imperfections are understood and sympathetically appreciated as well as challenged. Whenever he finds himself in a circle of love where he is 'completely known and all forgiven', something of the mercy of God is revealed to him and he catches a glimpse of the very perfection which has eluded him.[68]

Niebuhrian theology challenges Liberation theology concerning this issue of 'justification'. In its programmatic concerns, Liberation theology appears to minimalize this sense of 'the good felt as a present possession' because of its fear that it might weaken the impetus to social transformation. This difference emphasises the

Niebuhrian understanding that forgiveness relates to a dimension of the self which transcends social relationships.

This is not to say that Niebuhr does not perceive the danger of a too individualistic ethic. But Niebuhrian theology must be questioned concerning its success in avoiding this danger. Niebuhr recognizes the social dimensions of christian commitment but places the ethical tension of this understanding within a transcendent context. It is the perfectionism of Christ which maintains the 'tension' in human ethical endeavour. The danger of this type of ethical ideal is recognized by Gutiérrez.

> We may talk about accepting the gift of divine sonship and making all people our brothers and sisters. But if we do not live that acceptance from day to day in the conflict-ridden reality of history, then we are merely engaging in talk and allowing ourselves to indulge in the self-satisfaction of a noble ideal. This ideal must be translated into real-life identification with the interests of those human beings who actually are being subjected to oppression by other human beings. It must lead to identification with the struggles of the exploited classes. It must enrich political processes from within through its creativity and criticism, for those processes tend to close in upon themselves and mutilate authentic dimensions of the human person.[69]

Liberation theology challenges Niebuhrian theology to bring this ethical 'tension' down to earth. Liberation theology places this 'tension' in relation to the poor and oppressed and recognizes this as the context for the divine salvific encounter. In this manner Liberation theology places the love of God and the love of neighbour in an unavoidable intimacy which has concrete social, political and economic referents.

While recognizing this weakness in Niebuhrian theology, it must also be recognized that Liberation theology lends itself to a fundamental danger in its identification with the poor and oppressed. In its neglect of the dimension of divine transcendence as judgement and mercy, it leaves itself vulnerable to mistaking the 'spirit' of group identity for the 'Holy Spirit'. Niebuhr is aware of this danger.

> The possession of the self by something less than the 'Holy Spirit' means that it is possible for the self to be partly fulfilled and partly destroyed by its submission to a power and

> spirit which is greater than the self in its empiric reality but not great enough to do justice to the self in its ultimate freedom. ... The invasion and possession of the self by spirit, which is not the Holy Spirit, produces a spurious sense of transfiguration. The self is now no longer the little and narrow self, but the larger collective self of race or nation. But the real self is destroyed. The real self has a height of spiritual freedom which reaches beyond race and nation and which is closer to the eternal than the more earthbound collective entities of man's history.[70]

This brings us to consider the 'new self' as the culminating 'moment' in the salvific encounter. This 'new self' is the state of the self as a result of the divine encounter and conversion. The first thing that can be said of this 'new self' is that the individual is a person of faith. Liberation theology understands faith to be a confidence or trust that has its focus beyond the self. Gutiérrez understands one focus to be the love of God.

> Faith is confidence in love. It is faith in the Father who loved us first, without any merit of our own, and who fills our life with love and largess.[71]

This faith in God's love characterizes the life of the 'new self' as one which is secure in its openness to the future and responsive to God's love. Leonardo Boff also understands that this focus on God creates an existential attitude from which reality can be interpreted as either being ordered to God or deviating away from God.[72]

García identifies a second focus for faith in the promise of the Kingdom of God. This confidence in God's promise liberates the 'new self' from anxiety concerning the ambiguities of historical praxis.

> God frees God's people from the paralysing forms of anxiety and fears that are intrinsic to a struggle for justice taken under the most adverse odds. The divine promises make us aware that ultimately no immediate or remote historical power can prevent the final realization of the kingdom of justice. This assurance can free us to make a stand even when we are aware that we are not in control of all the variables and cannot be sure of the final outcome of our actions.[73]

In light of this faith, the 'new self' is also to be characterized as a being of praxis. As García states; "The new person is defined as

a being of praxis, capable of critical reflection and responsible action".[74] For Liberation theology this means that the 'new self' is not only one who has confidence in divine love and the ultimate realization of the Kingdom, but is also an agent in the approximate realization of that love and Kingdom. Thus, the 'new self' is not only a recipient of salvation, but also an active agent in its historical realization. Gutiérrez exemplifies this understanding; "To work, to transform this world, is to become a man and to build the human community; it is also to save".[75]

This brings us to a final characterization of the 'new self'. The 'new self' is fundamentally a person of community. It is in community that faith and praxis is realized. Gutiérrez understands that it is community which corresponds to the ultimate meaning of human life. "Man is destined to total communion with God and to the fullest brotherhood with all men".[76] For this reason community is not merely a result of faith and praxis, it is a fundamental dimension of the salvific encounter.

> Faith cannot be lived on the private level of a purely interior life, for faith is the rejection of any turning in upon oneself. The dynamism and inner thrust of the good news, the news which reveals us to be children of our heavenly Father and brothers and sisters of others, leads to the creation of a community that serves as a sign of Christ's liberation to our fellows.[77]

In this way the salvific encounter in all its 'moments' is seen to have a collective dimension. Boff also embraces this significance of community and adds to it his understanding of God's grace as sacramentally present in the neighbour.

> Grace and salvation are a joint effort of persons and their worlds, of persons and the communities with which they share life. One is responsible for the grace of the other. Each must be a sacrament of salvation for the other. Herein lies the deepest meaning of love for neighbour, which is to embrace even our enemy. Grace and salvation entail universal solidarity. The concrete course of divine love passes through human love and everyone that I approach.[78]

Once again we find that Niebuhrian theology has a different emphasis if not different content. Niebuhr is concerned with the

transcendent mercy and judgement of God and tends to focus his concerns on the existential dimension of human being. In regard to the 'new self' he perceives the agency of God's transcendence as the foundation for the possibility of true selfhood. This is not to say that he neglects the communal nature of selfhood, but rather places the social dimension in contingency to the transcendent.

> The Christian experience of the new life is an experience of a new selfhood. The new self is more truly a real self because the vicious circle of self-centredness has been broken. The self lives in and for others, in the general orientation of loyalty to, and love of, God; who alone can do justice to the freedom of the self over all partial interests and values. This new self is the real self; for the self is infinitely self-transcendent; and any premature centring of itself around its own interests, individually or collectively, destroys and corrupts its freedom.[79]

Thus, in regard to the transcendent mercy and judgement of God, the 'new self' attains this status by faith and God's grace.

> ... the new self is the Christ of intention rather than an actual achievement. It is the self only by faith, in the sense that its dominant purpose and intention are set in the direction of Christ as the norm. It is the self only by grace, in the sense that the divine mercy 'imputes' the perfection of Christ and accepts the self's intentions for achievements.[80]

In this manner Niebuhr emphasises justification by grace through faith over against Liberation theology's emphasis on historical praxis in regard to the 'new self'.

Having recognized this basic difference in emphasis, it must be stated that Niebuhrian theology does agree with Liberation theology at a great many points. It agrees with García that confidence in God's promise of the establishment of the Kingdom serves to free the self from anxiety concerning its agency in the various levels of liberation. And in relation to divine love, Niebuhr agrees with Gutiérrez when Niebuhr states; "The ideal possibility is that faith in the ultimate security of God's love would overcome all immediate insecurities of nature and history."[81]

In the same manner Niebuhrian theology agrees with Liberation theology that the 'new self' is a being of praxis and communal in

nature. Niebuhr simply wishes to establish the preeminence of divine transcendence in relation to these dimensions of human selfhood. From this perspective, faith has as much to do with contrition in recognizing our limits and pretensions as it does with confidence in love and promise which opens up the future to possibility.

This brings to a conclusion our examination of the salvific encounter as understood by Liberation theology. But this salvific encounter is not to be understood as an event which is self-contained and complete. Rather it is to be understood as the beginning of a process: a spirituality. It is this salvific encounter as a continuing process, as a spirituality, that is now to be examined and assessed.

Liberation spirituality

For Liberation theology, spirituality is a life-style determined by the specific socio-historical situation in which the divine encounter takes place. This spirituality avoids subjective individualism and is understood as a manner of life which is inclusive of all dimensions of human existence. As Gutiérrez states; "We need a vital attitude, all-embracing and synthesizing, informing the totality as well as every detail of our lives; we need a 'spirituality'."[82] In this manner, spirituality is a process of continual encounter, continual conversion, and continual realization of the 'new self'. According to Gutiérrez it is a journey, a discipleship, a continuous search for the fullness of communion with God and with other human beings.

This spiritual journey is fundamentally a collective journey. Because divine love and communion is at the heart of this spiritual experience, community is a necessary dimension of spirituality. Gutiérrez does not deny an individual dimension of spirituality, rather he places it in its proper context.

> ...'walking according to the Spirit' is an activity undertaken within a community, a people on the move. This is a dimension of every spirituality, despite presentations that at times suggest that a spirituality is for a purely individual journey. When I say that the following of Jesus is a collective adventure I am, of course, not eliminating the personal dimension; on the contrary, I

> am giving it its authentic meaning as a response to the convocation of the Father.[83]

For this reason community is at the heart of a spirituality. Gutiérrez understands that community is necessary for a spirituality to exist. "Without community support neither the emergence nor the continued existence of a new spirituality is possible".[84] And he also understands that the building up of community is essential to the whole salvific encounter. "Community life cultivates receptivity for God's reign and also proclaims it; in this receptivity and proclamation a community builds itself up as a community".[85]

This liberation spirituality has several distinctive attributes. A primary attribute is that of freedom. As Gutiérrez states;

> Spirituality, in the strict and profound sense of the word is the dominion of the Spirit. If 'the truth will set you free' (John 8:32), the Spirit 'will guide you into all the truth' (John 16:13) and will leads us to complete freedom, the freedom from everything that hinders us from fulfilling ourselves as men and sons of God and the freedom to love and to enter into communion with God and with others. It will lead us along the path of liberation because 'where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty' (2 Cor. 3:17).[86]

Leonardo Boff agrees with Gutiérrez and understands that it is grace, or the Holy Spirit, which arouses human beings to free activity. For Boff the spirit is freedom and God's activity permeates this freedom giving it greater intensity and affection.[87] Segundo also agrees that this attribute of freedom is fundamental to the christian life. He is especially concerned that freedom be understood as freedom *for* something; "... human liberty is liberty *for* something definitive and indeed eschatological: the building up of the kingdom of God".[88]

Another fundamental attribute of liberation spirituality is love. Gutiérrez understands that love is the central gift of the Spirit. This gift of the Spirit contains all other gifts of the Spirit which serve the building up of the community.

> Love is a source of dynamic activity and life. The power of the Spirit leads to love of God and others and not to the working of miracles. This is why the purpose of the charisms is the building up of the community.[89]

This gift of love and the empowering of freedom come to human beings from the grace of God. This grace comes undeserved and thus is the font of another attribute of liberation spirituality. This is the attribute of gratuitousness. Gutiérrez understands that gratuitousness is the human response to the gift of divine encounter and communion.

> A spirituality of liberation must be filled with a living sense of *gratuitousness*. Communion with the Lord and with all men is more than anything else a gift. ... the knowledge that at the root of our personal and community existence lies the gift of the self-communication of God, the grace of his friendship, fills our life with gratitude. It allows us to see our encounters with men, our loves, everything that happens in our life as a gift.[90]

For Gutiérrez it is this gratuitousness which is the source of joy. "... the gratuitousness which allows me to encounter others fully, the unique encounter which is the foundation of communion of men among themselves and of men with God, these are the source of Christian *joy*".[91]

Related to this attribute of gratuitousness is the quality which Gutiérrez calls spiritual childhood. This spiritual childhood involves a continual openess to God, being totally at God's disposal, and an abandonment and trust in the Lord. It is in this regard that Gutiérrez defines spiritual poverty.

> God's communication with us is a gift of love; to receive this gift it is necessary to be poor, a spiritual child. This poverty has no direct relationship to wealth; in the first instance it is not a question of indifference to the goods of this world. It goes deeper than that; it means to have no other sustenance than the will of God. This is the attitude of Christ".[92]

This spiritual poverty does not exclude voluntary material poverty. Voluntary poverty is a possibility of a spirituality in solidarity with the poor and oppressed.

> Evangelical poverty ... began to be lived as an act of liberation and love towards the poor of this world, as solidarity with them and protest against the poverty in which they live; as identification with the interests of the oppressed classes and a rejection of the exploitation of which they are the victims. If the ultimate cause of exploitation and alienation of man is

> egotism, the underlying motive of voluntary poverty is love for one's neighbour.[93]

In the above statement Gutiérrez introduces the final and unavoidable attribute of liberation spirituality. This is the attribute of solidarity. This is a solidarity rooted in the will of God and continually realized in relation to the poor and oppressed. Gutiérrez understands that this spirituality requires an ongoing conversion to the neighbour who is oppressed and poor. "A spirituality of liberation will centre on a *conversion* to the neighbour, the oppressed person, the exploited social class, the despised race, the dominated country".[94] Gutiérrez understands that it is in this solidarity that we live out our spirituality as a liberating praxis.

> Liberating involvement is the locus of a spiritual experience in which we encounter once more the great prophetic theme of the Old Testament and of Jesus' preaching alike: God and the poor person. To know God is to do justice, is to be in solidarity with the poor person.[95]

Leonardo Boff adds another dimension to the spirituality of liberation. He understands spirituality as a process within a *divine milieu* wherein the option for God can gain intensity throughout life. Boff calls this habitual grace or sanctification.

> The fundamental project of a human being can be oriented to God in such a way that it welcomes the divine mystery with every increasing intensity as life unfolds. In that case we can talk about an increase of grace. We are talking about a person's increasing openness to God, which presupposes and implies increasing self-giving on God's part as well.[96]

According to Boff, this process of habitual grace has two effects on the human self. It has the effect of creating greater coherence in human activity and it has the effect of creating a qualitative change in the human self and community.

> This habitual grace manifests itself *in operation*. It helps human beings achieve ever greater harmony between their fundamental project and their concrete, individual acts. It also plays a *formative* role, perfecting and unifying human beings. It elevates them to deeper communion, ensuring the victorious dominion of love, understanding, mercy, forgiveness, and sincerity in their

> lives. They become more and more tuned to all that is truly human and divine.[97]

For Boff, habitual grace is not guaranteed as a progressive process leading to greater and greater sanctification. It can also become a process of decrease of grace wherein the habitual dimension is reorientated away from God.

> Decrease of grace means that a human project is moving further and further away from God and drying up. Vices begin to take over and deviations in the moral life undermine our basic option. We begin to develop a different basic project in which God will no longer be the radical meaning of life or the culmination of existence.[98]

This decrease in grace can even lead to the total loss of God's grace. "The continued closing up of the human person to any higher destiny and the ongoing betrayal of God's appeals in reality can give rise to the total loss of God's grace".[99]

Juan Luis Segundo introduces a similar issue with the concept of 'merit'. By this term he understands that human activity and intention has 'eternal' worth which provides merit for gaining entrance to the eternal Kingdom of God. He rejects the protestant primacy of the concept of justification by faith over justification by good works in accordance with moral law. Segundo believes that 'merit' maintains a historical factor which transcendent justification by faith neglects. This is not to say the Segundo rejects justification by faith. He wishes to place the two positions in mutual modification and correction. He wants to avoid the legalism of theologies of merit and also avoid the passivity of theologies of transcendent justification. But overall, he places emphasis on the need for justification by merit as the primary impetus to historical transformation.[100]

In earlier critique of Niebuhr it was noted that he did not develop a coherent spirituality in regard to his theology. But his theology does address the issues of spirituality. In general, it could be said that Niebuhrian theology agrees with the qualities of spirituality identified by Gutiérrez. But Niebuhrian theology does perceive a transcendent dimension of the self and the divine life which

Gutiérrez neglects. This difference does lead to a qualifying of some of the optimism of these spiritual qualities.

One such spiritual quality which is subject to Niebuhrian qualification is that of freedom. Niebuhrian theology does not understand the self to obtain the degree of moral freedom which Liberation theology seems to assume. For Niebuhrian theology, this truth is demonstrated by the experience that guilt rises with moral achievement. In this regard the self is not free enough to make absolute distinctions.

> The fact that the sense of guilt rises vertically with all moral achievement and is, therefore, not assuaged by it nor subject to diminution or addition by favourable and unfavourable social opinion, throws a significant light on the relation of freedom to sin. The ultimate proof of the freedom of the human spirit is its own recognition that its will is not free to choose between good and evil. For in the highest reaches of the freedom of the spirit the self discovers in contemplation and retrospect that previous actions have invariably confused the ultimate reality and value, which the self as spirit senses, with the immediate necessities of the self. If the self assumes that because it realizes this fact in past actions, it will be able to avoid the corruption in future actions, it will merely fall prey to the Pharisaic fallacy.[101]

In the same manner the quality of love comes under qualification. Niebuhr understands that the tragic quality of the spiritual life is that self-love and the experience of divine love are always confused.[102]

It is in relation to these qualifications concerning freedom and love that Niebuhrian theology would broaden the understanding of gratuitousness held by Gutiérrez. Not only is gratuitousness in response to the gift of love and communion. It is also the response to a mercy wherein forgiveness is a gift in spite of the perineal nature of human sin.

> Whenever the power of sinful self-love is taken seriously there is a concomitant sense of gratitude in the experience of release from the self. It is felt that this is a miracle which the self could not have accomplished. The self is too completely its own prisoner by the 'vain imagination' of sins to be able to deliver itself.[103]

In this manner the spirituality of Niebuhrian theology is understood as a religion of grace which; "...seeks to console the human spirit to its inevitable defeat in the world of nature and history".[104]

In regard to the charisms of the Holy Spirit, Niebuhrian theology is in agreement with Gutiérrez. Niebuhr understands that the Holy Spirit is the indwelling of the spirit of God in human beings. This indwelling provides resources of love, wisdom, and power. Niebuhr is careful to note that the Holy Spirit is not to be identified and confused with the most universal and transcendent levels of the human mind or consciousness. But he does understand that there is a degree of continuity and compatibility between the human selfhood and the Holy Spirit.[105]

Where the spirituality of Niebuhrian theology is challenged by Gutiérrez concerns solidarity as a spiritual quality. Once again we see that Niebuhrian theology neglects the historical and social dimension in favour of the transcendent. Solidarity as a quality of spirituality makes spirituality a historical and social experience. It provides the necessary dynamic to prevent spirituality becoming solely an existential subjective experience of a purely transcendent reality.

Where Niebuhrian theology is in disagreement with Liberation spirituality is concerning Boff's understanding of habitual grace and Segundo's concept of merit. Niebuhrian theology understands that Boff has confused two dimensions of grace. Niebuhr understands that God's grace is a power over human beings and also a power in human beings. As a power over human beings, grace is judgement and mercy which is revealed as forgiveness. This grace completes what human beings cannot complete and overcomes human sin. As a power in human beings, grace is the resources of love, wisdom and power which are available to human beings through faith. Boff seems to neglect grace as a power over human beings and reduce it to a power in human beings. This leaves the human being on a sliding scale where human agency determines divine relationship. Niebuhrian theology wants to maintain the emphasis on divine power as forgiveness over human life which determines the divine-human relationship. According to the Niebuhrian position, sliding up or down the 'habitual scale' makes no difference in one's relationship with God. For Niebuhrian theology there is no point in

'sanctification' in which God is more or less distant. At all points in the journey of life forgiveness is needed and available.

It is this same issue which is at stake in the Niebuhrian disagreement with Segundo. The concept of merit places salvific agency in the intentions of the human self rather than in the agency of a God which transcends all human actions and intentions. Once again it appears that human agency qualifies the divine relationship with human beings. Niebuhrian theology avoids this position in the recognition that human agency is never transparent concerning ultimate value. To place the divine-human relationship in dependence on human behaviour or intention inevitably results in ambiguity due to the confusion inherent in all human intention and behaviour. This ambiguity is avoided in the Niebuhrian position. A Niebuhrian spirituality realizes that the divine-human relationship is one which is initiated and fulfilled by divine love and forgiveness. It is this grace as power over human beings which is unambiguous and which qualifies the ambiguity of human intention and action.

The significance of salvation-liberation for a theology of justice

At the heart of the dialogue between Niebuhrian theology and Liberation theology is the issue of transcendence and immanence. It is around this issue that the concept of justice is determined. Niebuhr apprehends the transcendent self-giving love of God, which judges and reveals all human endeavour in its self-delusion and pretension, as the guiding norm of justice. Liberation theology apprehends an immanent divine source of love and agency, which transforms all human agency and reveals its possibilities and freedom, as its regulative norm. In the same manner Niebuhr perceives that sin as self-regard and will-to-power is an immanent dynamic inherent in the very freedom of the human self and revealed in all dimensions of individual and collective life. In corresponding fashion, Liberation theology perceives sin as transcending the self and as an aberration which conditions the life of the self and which is located in the determinisms of economic, political, and social structures and systems. In isolation and mutual exclusion these various positions are resistive to the development of

justice. But if taken as the various dimensions of a unified dialectic, then these insights provide a fertile ground in which a concept of justice can take root.

For Niebuhrian theology the significance of salvation-liberation is in its transcendent power of divine forgiveness in regard to the realization that self-regard and will-to-power are perennial in human history. But Niebuhrian theology needs to be informed by a qualified optimism that Liberation theology provides in its understanding of liberation as an individual, social and spiritual historical praxis. This is especially true of the insights of Míguez Bonino and García. While Niebuhr rejects a teleological cosmology of grace and a sacramental view of divine immanence in human beings, he does recognize the power of love as a transforming force in human agency and he does recognize the fundamental openness and possibility that confronts human beings as creators of history. What the dialogue with Liberation theology provides is substance for these convictions.

The most substantial contribution which Liberation theology makes to the Niebuhrian understanding of justice is the role of the poor as a qualifying referent in tension with the Niebuhrian norm of transcendent divine self-giving love. The poor serve as an immanent criterion by which social justice is assessed in its adequacy and challenged to increasing effectiveness. In this way the poor serve as a historical mediation of divine judgement and mercy. In the poor we are confronted with both our failure to love and with the possibility of loving more effectively. This confrontation has a divine dimension and theological significance grounded in the divine filiation with all humanity. In this way Liberation theology provides a criterion which can serve in a historical-transhistorical dialectic with the Niebuhrian norm of transcendent love. This dialectic avoids the tendency toward subjective individualism resulting from the emphasis of Niebuhrian theology on transcendence. In the same manner, this dialectic avoids the restricted immanentism and collectivism of Liberation theology.

It is at this point that the critical comparison of christologies becomes important. Both Niebuhrian theology and Liberation theology appeal to the significance of Jesus Christ for the justification of their respective positions. These theologies are christocentric and

appeal to a christology in order to justify the various theological values which are regulative concerning the subsequent ways and means to establish justice.

NOTES

1. Leonardo Boff, *Liberating Grace*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1979, pages 58 - 61.
2. Ibid., pages 6, 89, and 100.
3. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1973, page 194.
4. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1984, page 64.
5. Boff, op. cit., pages 82 and 83.
6. Ibid., page 116.
7. Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Assurance of Grace", in *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr*, Robert McAfee Brown ed., New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1986, pages 62 and 63.
8. Ibid., page 65.
9. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. I, London, Nisbet and Co. Ltd., 1941, pages 180 and 181.
10. Niebuhr, "The Assurance of Grace", op. cit., page 63.
11. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. II, London, Nisbet and Co. Ltd., 1943, pages 66, 102, and 103.
12. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1983, page 31.
13. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, op. cit., page 52.
14. Ibid., pages 158 and 159.
15. Ibid., pages 202, 203, and 208.
16. Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Salvation and Liberation*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1984, pages 18, 19, and 52.
17. Boff, *Liberating Grace*, op. cit., page 110.
18. Ibid., page 119.
19. Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Salvation and Liberation*, op. cit., page 60.
20. Boff, *Liberating Grace*, op. cit., pages 82 and 83.
21. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. II, op. cit., page 68.
22. See above pages 53 - 58.
23. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. II, op. cit., pages 50 and 51.
24. Ibid., page 128.
25. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. I, op. cit., page 240.
26. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, op. cit., page 162.
27. Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Salvation and Liberation*, op. cit., pages 56 and 57.
28. Ibid.
29. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, op. cit., page 160.
30. Ibid., pages 160 and 164.
31. Ibid., page 168.
32. José Míguez Bonino, "Historical Praxis and Christian Identity", in *Frontiers of Theology in Latin America*, Rosino Gibellini ed., Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1979, pages 273 and 274.
33. Ibid., page 274.

34. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. II, op. cit., page 154.
35. Ibid., page 89.
36. Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Salvation and Liberation*, op. cit., page 38.
37. Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, op. cit., page 15.
38. Boff, *Liberating Grace*, op. cit., pages 3 and 131.
39. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, op. cit., page 151.
40. Ibid., page 150.
41. Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Salvation and Liberation*, op. cit., page 53.
42. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, op. cit., page 194.
43. Ibid., page 200.
44. Ibid., page 201.
45. Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, op. cit., page 52.
46. Ibid., page 52.
47. Ibid., page 51.
48. Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Salvation and Liberation*, op. cit., page 63.
49. Ibid., pages 18 and 19.
50. Boff, *Liberating Grace*, op. cit., page 149.
51. Ismael García, *Justice in Latin American Theology of Liberation*, Atlanta, John Knox Press, 1987, page 93.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid., page 94.
54. Ibid.
55. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. II, op. cit., page 343 and 345.
56. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. I, op. cit., page 272.
57. Ibid., pages 238 and 239.
58. Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Liberation, Theology, and Proclamation", in *Concilium - Theology of Liberation: Liberation and Faith*, Claude Geffre and Gustavo Gutiérrez ed., vol. 6, No. 10, June 1974, page 66.
59. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, op. cit., page 198.
60. Ibid., pages 91 and 146.
61. Gutiérrez, "Liberation, Theology, and Proclamation", op. cit., page 59.
62. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, op. cit., page 205.
63. Gutiérrez, *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, op. cit., page 98.
64. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, op. cit., page 205.
65. Boff, *Liberating Grace*, op. cit., page 85.
66. García, op. cit., page 69.
67. Ibid., page 101.
68. Niebuhr, "The Assurance of Grace", op. cit., pages 64 and 65.
69. Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Liberation Praxis and Christian Faith", in *Frontiers of Theology in Latin America*, Rosino Gibellini ed., Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1979, page 21.
70. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. II, op. cit., pages 114 and 115.
71. Gutiérrez, *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, op. cit., page 20.
72. Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Salvation and Liberation*, op. cit., page 52.
73. García, op. cit., page 96.

74. Ibid., page 92.
75. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, op. cit., page 159.
76. Ibid., page 198.
77. Gutiérrez, "Liberation Praxis and Christian Faith", op. cit., page 26.
78. Boff, *Liberating Grace*, op. cit., page 119.
79. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. II, op. cit., page 114.
80. Ibid., page 119.
81. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. I, op. cit., page 195.
82. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, op. cit., page 203.
83. Gutiérrez, *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, op. cit., page 89.
84. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, op. cit., page 207.
85. Gutiérrez, *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, op. cit., page 133.
86. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, op. cit., pages 203 and 204.
87. Boff, *Liberating Grace*, op. cit., pages 140, 150, and 153.
88. Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology*, Dublin, Gill and MacMillan, 1976, page 150.
89. Gutiérrez, *We Drink From Our Own Wells*, op. cit., pages 62 and 63.
90. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, op. cit., pages 205 and 206.
91. Ibid., page 207.
92. Ibid., page 297.
93. Gutiérrez, "Liberation, Theology, and Proclamation", op. cit., page 64.
94. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, op. cit., page 132.
95. Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, op. cit., page 51.
96. Boff, *Liberating Grace*, op. cit., page 132.
97. Ibid., page 129.
98. Ibid., page 132.
99. Ibid., pages 132 and 133.
100. Segundo, *Liberation of Theology*, op. cit., pages 200, 202, and 206.
101. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. I, op. cit., page 274.
102. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. II, op. cit., page 142.
103. Ibid., page 119.
104. Niebuhr, "The Assurance of Grace", op. cit., page 61.
105. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. II, op. cit., page 340.

8. LIBERATION CHRISTOLOGY

Christology stands at the centre of both Liberation and Niebuhrian theology. The christocentric concern of both theologies allows these theologies to stand in critical dialogue leading to mutual modification. These two theologies have very little in common except the conviction that christology is relevant in relation to possibilities of history. It is this common thematic concern which makes comparison possible and productive. The realization of justice in history is the focal concern of both Liberation and Niebuhrian christology.

This chapter will not attempt to bring Niebuhr into exhaustive comparison with the christological reflections of every Latin American theologian. While this presentation of Liberation christology will range far and wide, it will primarily look to a core of literature provided by Leonardo Boff and Jon Sobrino. This core literature will be the christological works, *Jesus Christ Liberator* and *Christology at the Crossroads*, respectively.

Alfredo Fierro makes the observation that christologies always depend on extra-christological presuppositions.[1] Two of these extra-christological presuppositions need to be made explicit in approaching Liberation christology. The first of these is the recognition that christologies are worked out within a theological framework. Decisions about God and human existence are in many ways prior to christological work. This would seem to indicate a circular relationship between the theological format and the particularity of christological formulation. We bring theology to the task of christological reflection, but our christological work may change our understanding of God and human existence. This hermeneutical circle between the horizons of a theology and the specific reflection on christology can be perceived in previous examination of sin and salvation. This concern for the larger

theological context will stand in the background as we examine Liberation christology.

A second extra-christological presupposition is the socio-political context in which christological reflection takes place. Boff recognizes this to be an unavoidable dimension of christological reflection which disallows any claim to neutrality.

> The themes and emphases of a given Christology flow from what seems relevant to the theologian on the basis of his or her social standpoint. In that sense we must maintain that no Christology is or can be neutral. Every Christology is partisan and committed. Willingly or unwillingly christological discourse is voiced in a given social setting with all the conflicting interests that pervade it.[2]

The role and importance of the social setting for christological reflection will become more obvious when we examine the hermeneutical circle employed by Liberation christology. At this point it is sufficient to note that what justifies the predicate 'Liberation' for christology is its liberating function within a given socio-political setting. Thus, Liberation christology is relevant insofar as it is a force for socio-political transformation.

Having taken note of the general theological and socio-political environment of christological reflection, it is now appropriate to observe where Liberation christology begins in theological reflection. The beginning point of christological reflection is probably best exemplified by where it does not begin. For most Liberation theologians it does not begin with the classical christological formulations. Gustavo Gutiérrez is one of the few theologians who starts with the classical affirmations of christology with an emphasis on the historical relevance of these formulations. He uses what Sobrino calls a 'christology of descent'. Sobrino and Boff are representative of christological reflection which has another beginning point. They begin with a 'christology of ascent' which is founded in the 'historical Jesus'.[3] This alternate beginning point is reflective of suspicion and sometimes rejection of classical formulations. Sobrino is representative of this suspicion of classical christology. He rejects classical christology as a starting place because it tends

to abstract the 'historical Jesus'. This tendency toward abstraction removes Jesus from history and thus creates an impartial Christ which is available for manipulation by the various interests in socio-political life.[4] Liberation theologians have chosen the 'historical Jesus' as the starting point of christological reflection because this procedural starting point guarantees the historical dimension in theological reflection.

In starting with the 'historical Jesus', Liberation theology develops a christology which is relevant to the conflicts of socio-political life. This 'historical Jesus' becomes the measure and judge of christological formulations. As Miranda states;

> No authority can decree that everything is permitted; for justice and exploitation are not so indistinguishable. And Christ died so that we might know that not everything is permitted. But not any Christ. The Christ who cannot be co-opted by accommodationists and opportunists as the historical Jesus. ...
> Only the historical Jesus can judge our differences and be measure of our theologies. And for us this Jesus is to be found in the Bible.[5]

Reinhold Niebuhr agrees with this starting point. He too, is concerned with maintaining the historical significance of christology. But his approach is quite different. He develops what can be called a mythical-prophetic christology. He is concerned with the 'historical Jesus' as a symbol of the eternal within history.

> Religious faith needs specific symbols; and the Jesus of history is a perfect symbol of the absolute in history because the perfect love to which pure spirit aspires is vividly realized in the drama of his life and cross. Thus a man becomes the symbol of God and the religious sense that the absolute invades the relative and the historical is adequately expressed.[6]

In this mythical-prophetic approach, Niebuhr is concerned to maintain the insights of classical christological formulations in their relevance to history. But he agrees with Liberation theology in suspicion and rejection of metaphysical abstraction. In orthodox formulations he perceives that the historical and human characteristics of Christ are lost in a reduction to speculative reason.[7] Niebuhr maintains the insights of classical christology by recognizing their

significance as symbol and myth. In this way he can maintain the paradox found in these formulations without recourse to ontological rationalization.

While Niebuhr looks to the 'historical Jesus' for historical relevance in christological formulation, his christology is never-the-less a 'christology of descent'. He is primarily concerned with the transcendent dimension and significance of Jesus Christ. In this manner the 'Christ myth' stands in prophetic confrontation with the aspirations of historical development. This raises a question concerning the adequacy of his development and understanding of the 'historical Jesus'. Dennis McCann and J.M. Lochman both raise the question of this relationship. McCann points out that Niebuhr's religio-poetic symbol of the 'historical Jesus' may not in fact conform to the life and teachings found in the biblical text. He recognises that Niebuhr's formulation is vulnerable to historical criticism.[8] Lochman asks a similar question concerning Niebuhr's symbolical method. He recognizes that this method itself has a tendency to portray Jesus Christ in docetic terms which neglect the concreteness of a human-divine life in history.[9] This criticism will be further explored as we examine the interpretation and content of this 'historical Jesus'.

Before examining this hermeneutical process that allows definition of the 'historical Jesus', it is important to make explicit the epistemological presupposition of Liberation theology. Boff understands that access to the significance of Jesus Christ does not come through abstract analysis. Jesus Christ is not an 'object' of analysis but rather a 'subject' and 'person' who is known through relationship. For this reason, knowledge of Jesus Christ follows the same path as the first disciples; "...it was by seeing, imitating, deciphering, and living with Jesus that his disciples came to know God and the human person".[10] Thus, it is by faith and discipleship that we also come to comprehend Jesus Christ. Sobrino makes this same point concerning epistemology.

> It is not just that discipleship is one of the fundamental themes of any Christology that seeks to reflect on the life of Jesus. Nor is it just that discipleship is the gospel's way of expressing what is most fundamental in Christian ethics. I stress the

following of Jesus here because it is only this that makes christological epistemology possible at all.'[11]

Niebuhr also understands that Jesus Christ can not be reduced to a 'object' or 'fact' of history. He emphasises that Christ is known through repentance and faith.'[12] This repentance and faith is in relationship to divine meaning and grace which transcend human possibilities of knowledge in a realm of mystery. Again we perceive that Niebuhr emphasizes the transcendent dimension of this relationship. This stands in stark contrast to Liberation theology which seeks knowledge of Jesus Christ in a relationship of discipleship or historical praxis. For Niebuhr, Jesus Christ is the 'symbol' of divine judgement and grace leading to repentance and faith. For Liberation theology, Jesus Christ is the way of historical praxis wherein God and the human are known. One must ask whether these epistemological differences are mutual exclusive or whether they indicate a dialectic of knowledge which includes both transcendent and historical references. Regardless of how this difference is resolved, both Liberation theology and Niebuhrian theology are in agreement that knowledge of Jesus Christ involves a relationship which can not be reduced to simple rational abstraction.

Given this relational epistemology we can now examine the hermeneutical process utilized by Liberation theology. Liberation theology understands the hermeneutical process to entail a hermeneutical circle between the 'historical Jesus' of the biblical text and the current socio-political context. This is a dialectical process involving Jesus' history and our history. Raul Vidales describes this dialectical process in the following manner.

> ... it is not ... a matter of promoting novel para-dogmatic fundamentalisms, or mechanistic processes of inconsistent and uncritical transposition, comparison, accommodation, or parallelism. It is a matter of constructing and applying a hermeneutical process that will be able to establish the dialectical interrelationship, between the historical event of Jesus and his word, and the historical experience today in which the commitment of faith is required now here, and now suddenly there.'[13]

The first moment in this hermeneutical circle has to do with what is brought from the social context to the biblical text. Ellacuría understands that the interpreter brings a fundamental question concerning "... how Jesus actualizes the fullness of his mission as saviour of human beings".[14] This question brings with it the contextual concerns of Latin America. Boff understands that Latin Americans question the 'historical Jesus' from the perspective of dependence and oppression.[15] This questioning recognizes that there are no neutral christologies. Liberation theologians recognize that the christologies which already exist in the Latin American context serve various socio-political interests. They also recognize that these christologies have not been in the service of the poor and oppressed, but rather the oppressor. Thus, it is the intention of Liberation theology to ask questions of the 'historical Jesus' from the perspective of the poor and oppressed and thereby come to an understanding of christology which speaks to their needs and concerns. It is this context of socio-political oppression which is brought to the interpretive process.[16]

The second moment in this hermeneutical circle is the reading of the 'historical Jesus'. This interpretive 'reading' is not a simple process. It is complicated by the fact that the interpreter has no direct access to the Jesus of history to whom the biblical texts bear witness. As Míguez Bonino understands, we are left with a plurality of christologies.

> Even without succumbing to Bultmann's radical skepticism, we have to admit that biblical studies show not only that we have various christologies already present even in the New Testament, but that it is impossible to 'go behind' these images, which already contain theological interpretation, in order thus to arrive at a 'historical Jesus'. What the New Testament gives us, as we weary of hearing, is a message, not a biography.[17]

Other Liberation theologians are not as skeptical as Míguez Bonino. Segundo recognizes that there is no direct access to the 'historical Jesus', but this does not mean there is no access to him. Segundo understands the interpretive process involves entering into the hermeneutical circle within the biblical text. This means entering

into the dialogue that is occurring between the 'historical Jesus' and his New Testament interpreters.

> The correct solution, it seems to me, lies in the realization that the study of the historical Jesus, far from depriving the *interpretation* of the witnesses (Paul, Matthew, etc.) of importance, gives it its real value and ensures its future relevance. When we establish a certain distance between Jesus and his interpreters, it is easier for us to discover the creative work of the latter, the reasons for their interest in Jesus, their set of problems and how the human being Jesus shed light on it. Instead of being mere screens between Jesus and ourselves, such people as Matthew, Mark, and Paul become witnesses in and of themselves, not just to Jesus. They become real people with their own meaningful content, and the latter makes them interesting to us in turn.[18]

Segundo understands that this process does not give us a definitive interpretation. We are still left with a plurality of christological interpretations in the scripture.

In spite of this christological plurality in scripture, Liberation theologians do believe that exegesis can provide us with a basic understanding of the 'historical Jesus'. Miranda believes it is this Jesus of the New Testament which prevents us from arbitrarily creating a christology to serve our own ideological concerns.[19] Sobrino is also in agreement that while we can not identify Jesus with historical certainty, we can at least establish basic traits of Jesus with moral certainty.[20]

Another issue which complicates the interpretive process is what Croatto calls the reservoir of meaning within a text. Not only is there a plurality of christological interpretations in the biblical text, but there are also dimensions of the text which only come to light when interpreted within a particular context.

> The meaning of Christ's praxis is codified in a *text*. This text, both as linguistic structure and as message, lies open to interpretation. This interpretation is not something *added* to the original meaning. It is this *same* meaning, now read in a richer and more inclusive dimension.[21]

For Liberation theology the context which enters into the interpretive process is the context of socio-political oppression.

This brings Liberation theology to read the 'historical Jesus' from a particular interpretive vantage point. This vantage point is history and its socio-political dimensions. Boff is representative of this socio-political interpretive focus and describes it in the following manner.

> It examines and gives special emphasis to all the gestures, words, and attitudes of Jesus that have to do with conversion, a change in existing relationships, a rapprochement with those on the outer margins of Jewish society, a predilection for the poor, a willingness to challenge the religious and social status quo of his day, and the political content of his proclamation of God's kingdom.[22]

For Sobrino this is an interpretive process which historicizes the figure of Jesus and makes him relevant for human existence in current history.

> The aim is not just to overcome the aura of mythology that surrounds Christology and thus indirectly get at the real Christian morality of Jesus. It also is looking for a focus that will historicize the figure of Jesus in an authentic and truly operative way. ... The supposition is that in and through a real historicization of Jesus we will discover the most profound dimension of his existence as the Son, and hence the most profound dimension of those whom 'he is not ashamed to call ... brothers.' (Heb. 2:11).[23]

This hermeneutic of historical praxis places Liberation theology in contrast with the Niebuhrian hermeneutic of mythical-symbolic interpretation. The Niebuhrian position is closer to Míguez Bonino when he states that the biblical text provides us with a message and not a biography. This is not to say that Liberation theology rejects mythical-symbolic language. Boff recognizes the vitality of such language in indicating transcendent dimensions of human existence.

> ...myth, symbol, and analogy constitute the core of religious language; we can speak only with great hesitation and must use figurative and representative language when dealing with the most profound realities of life, of good and evil, of joy and sorrow, of human beings and the Absolute. ... this mode of expression is more involving than cold conceptualization. Because it has no tight and defined limits it is far more suggestive of the ineffable and the transcendent than any other scientific language or historical method.[24]

Where Liberation theology differs with Niebuhrian theology is the starting place. Liberation christology begins with the historical dimensions of the Jesus of the biblical text. In this way the socio-political dimensions of Jesus' life come to the fore in the development of christology. It is this emphasis which is lacking in Niebuhr's development of christology.

In contrast to Liberation christology, Niebuhrian theology is suspicious concerning the optimism with which Liberation theology identifies the 'historical Jesus'. This is especially true in regard to Segundo and his assertion that a 'distance' can be established between Jesus and his interpreters. Niebuhrian theology recognizes the unresolvable obscurity of the historicity of Jesus. It is for this reason that Niebuhr finds language of myth and symbol more helpful. This dramatic-historical approach avoids the problems of historicity. For this same reason, Niebuhrian theology questions Liberation theology in its assertion that the 'historical Jesus' is less subject to manipulation by interested parties. The recognition of the 'reservoir of meaning' or interpretive flexibility in a text demonstrates an ambiguity in the text which can be exploited to justify various interests.

Hugo Assmann points out that establishing a description of Jesus through exegesis of the biblical texts is not sufficient to ground a christology. All christologies functioning within a particular context can make the same claims due to the plurality of christologies in the New Testament texts and the reservoir of meaning inherent in the text. This means that other criteria are needed.[25] This brings us to the final movement of the hermeneutical circle: the movement from the reading of the 'historical Jesus' to the socio-political context.

This move from the reading of the 'historical Jesus' to the socio-political context involves situating Jesus in current history. It is, as Assmann understands, a question concerning where and through whom Christ is operating in current history.[26] This means that christological reflection in the context of oppression looks to the 'historical Jesus' who provides the way of liberation. According to

Sobrino and Boff, this christology is operative in Jesus as Liberator. As Sobrino states;

> Emphasis is placed on those christological elements that serve to constitute a paradigm of liberation (e.g., the resurrection as utopia and the kingdom of God) or to highlight practical ways of understanding and realizing it (e.g., the socio-political activity of Jesus and the obligation to follow in his footsteps).[27]

Boff understands that this hermeneutical move from the 'historical Jesus' to the current context is a necessary move for every generation. "Each generation ought to confront itself with the mystery of Christ and try to give him the names that correspond to our living experience of his inexhaustible reality".[28] In this way christology is an open ended process ever being realized within particular socio-political contexts. For the context of Latin America this is a christology which realizes Jesus as Liberator.

This realization of a Liberation christology within a context of oppression means that this christology is one of crisis. Boff understands that this hermeneutical process necessarily brings us into confrontation with the 'historical Jesus' and his praxis in favour of the oppressed and poor. This calls into question our historical praxis and challenges us to discipleship in liberative praxis.[29] Assmann also understands that this christology places us in the conflict of the socio-political situation. In following a Christ who is Liberator we necessarily come into conflict with the many other 'christs' serving other ideological interests.[30]

In the above we have briefly examined the hermeneutical process of Liberation theology. It is now appropriate to move from analysis of method to actual content. In the following sections we will be concerned with elaborating and assessing what Liberation theology understands as the 'historical Jesus'. This analysis will be organized under the headings of Ministry of Jesus, Death of Jesus, Resurrection of Jesus, and Continuing presence of Jesus.

"Historical Jesus": ministry of Jesus

For Liberation theology the 'historical Jesus' is thoroughly a human being subject to all the dynamics of human existence. As Boff states;

> All that is authentically human appears in Jesus: anger and joy, goodness and toughness, friendship and indignation. He possesses all the human dimensions of vigour, vitality, and spontaneity. He partook of all our feelings and the common conditionings of human life...[31]

He also understands Jesus to be a person of imagination and good sense. For Boff these are fundamental qualities of Jesus. Creative imagination allows Jesus to perceive human beings as greater and richer than the cultural environment that surrounds them. For Boff good sense "consists in grasping the original nature of human beings, which we all live and know but find difficult to formulate and translate into images".[32]

In addition to these human qualities, Jesus is also a person subject to limitation in knowledge and subject to temptation. Sobrino understands that Jesus was subject to ignorance and to the process of intellectual growth as is common to humanity. In the same way Jesus was also subject to temptation throughout his ministry. In the face of various historical limitations, Jesus was tempted to resolve these conflicts in a manner inconsistent with his ministry.[33]

This limitation and conflict in Jesus' human existence leads to another central concern of Liberation theologians. Liberation christology wants to assert that Jesus' awareness of his relationship to the Father and to his ministry were never possessed as static absolute knowledge. Rather they assert that his awareness grew and changed in relation to the concrete conflicts in which he found himself. As Sobrino states;

> We shall be studying the person of Jesus, whose awareness did not grow mechanically but in connection with his own real-life praxis and the conflicts it evoked. It also means that we shall stress that there was a process of evolution going on in Jesus himself, not only on the level of normal human development but also on the theological level of his relationship with the Father.[34]

It is this developmental understanding of Jesus' self-awareness and his ministry that provides the focal concern for reading the 'historical Jesus'. For Sobrino this focal concern is identified as the faith of Jesus. The faith of Jesus has to do with his historical praxis and its development. In reading the 'historical Jesus' as the history of Jesus' faith we place Jesus firmly in the socio-political context and the conflicts of that context.[35]

Niebuhrian theology agrees with the fundamental assertion of Liberation theology concerning Jesus' humanity. Niebuhr agrees that Jesus was subject to the conditioned and contingent existence common to human beings and therefore was also subject to ignorance and temptation.[36] Niebuhr even goes so far as to reject metaphysical and moral assertions of perfection or sinlessness in Jesus. In this regard he agrees with Schleiermacher.

> Schleiermacher is quite right of course in suggesting that to be tempted means in a sense to have sinned; for temptation is a state of anxiety from which sin flows inevitably. And this anxiety is a concomitant of finite and insecure existence. It is not possible for this reason to assert the sinlessness of every individual act of any actually historical character.[37]

Niebuhr takes this course in order to reject any reduction of Jesus to simple historical facts that can be measured. As always, Niebuhr is concerned to protect the transcendent dimension of Christ as mystery. In order to accomplish this he understands 'perfection' and 'sinlessness' as embodied in the relational dynamic of *agape*. This relational dynamic does not lend itself to measurement and therefore maintains the paradox of Jesus who is fully human and yet the mediation of divine *agape*. In this way mystery and transcendence are maintained within the conditioned and contingent person of history.

Of course, Liberation christology is not concerned with Jesus' humanity in order to maintain the paradox of a Jesus as fully God and fully human. Liberation christology is concerned to explore the humanity of Jesus in order to illuminate his faith as historical praxis. For Liberation theology it is this faith as historical praxis which gives content and direction to the task of following Jesus in

contemporary history. It is to the content of this faith as historical praxis that we now turn.

The faith of the 'historical Jesus' as praxis needs to be examined from two perspectives. These two perspectives are the Fatherhood of God and the Kingdom of God. Both of these dimensions of Jesus' historical praxis are concerned with reference to the divine and are religio-political in function. Both 'Father' and 'Kingdom' are in reference to the one God revealed in Jesus' self-understanding and ministry. Therefore, it must be kept in mind that this division is somewhat artificial. The difference between 'Father' and 'Kingdom' has to do with emphasis in examination rather than in the praxis of Jesus. 'Father' can be understood to refer to the relational, existential, and 'vertical' dimension while 'Kingdom' refers to the operational, historical, and 'horizontal'.

Both Boff and Sobrino understand that Jesus had a unique relationship with God wherein he knew him as Father.[38] This Father-son relationship is realized in the openness and nearness of God to Jesus. Jesus is aware of God drawing close to him. It is this intimacy of Father to son that gives Jesus the authority to speak and act in God's name. As Boff states;

> We believe that his profound experience of the Father, as well as the corresponding sonship, constitute the basis of Jesus' awareness of being the messenger and the inaugurator of the kingdom of God. Jesus did not use the title 'Son of God' to express this religious experience. But his sonship was the basis for the primitive community to call him the only-begotten Son of God. Intimacy with the Father gives him authority to speak and act in the place of God.[39]

Sobrino also understands that it is in this relationship that Jesus is conscious of his mission.

> Alongside this movement of Jesus toward the Father in total trust and confidence is Jesus' awareness of the Father's movement toward him. The Father has given him a mission, and Jesus' response is one of total *obedience*.[40]

Sobrino perceives that the relationship of Jesus to the Father is one of trust and obedience. This relationship consists of trust in the

Father's presence and obedience to the mission which the Father entrusts to him. For Sobrino this is the content of the history of Jesus' faith: his trust in God and his fidelity to his mission.[41]

The mission and ministry to which Jesus is called is that of bringing other human beings into this relationship to the Father. According to Boff this means that Jesus 'fleshes-out' the love of God.[42] He understands Jesus to be completely open to God and to others, to love indiscriminately without limits. Boff calls this quality 'being-for-others'; "The whole life of Jesus was a giving, a being-for-others, an attempt to overcome all conflicts in his own existence, and a realization of this goal".[43] Or as Gutierrez states; "Loving us as a man, Christ reveals to us the Father's love".[44] Thus in word and in deed, Jesus' historical praxis was that of proclaiming God as Father full of mercy and inclusive love.

Sobrino wants to make a careful distinction concerning this revelation in Jesus of God as loving Father. Remaining within the relational categories of Father-son, he wants to emphasize that Jesus is not the revelation of the absolute mystery of God, but rather the revelation of the way of being a 'Son'.

> Strictly speaking ... Jesus reveals the Son. And if we view Jesus in terms of his concrete history, we can say that what Jesus reveals to us is the way of the Son, the way one becomes Son of God. Jesus does not, then, reveal the absolute mystery. He reveals how one may respond to that absolute mystery through trust and obedience to the mission of the kingdom.[45]

In this way Sobrino is concerned to maintain that Jesus carries out his praxis in confidence and trust in a transcendent God and also as Son of the Father to carry out his mission as 'firstborn' and brother to other human beings.

As 'firstborn' and brother to other human beings, Jesus calls others to be children of God. Miranda understands that being children of God is a functional rather than an ontological status. Corresponding to the Father-son relationship, to be children of God involves the relational dimension. To be a child of God means to love your enemy, show compassion, be peacemakers.[46]

This historical praxis of fraternal love means that the presence of Jesus discloses human sin. In the presence of Jesus, human beings are made aware of their failure to be children of God. As Sobrino states; "Jesus is aware of the fact that every human being can be an oppressor, and that traits of oppressor and oppressed can be found in all".[47]

This historical praxis of fraternal love not only reveals the general condition of sin in human life, it also has a specific historical focus. As Boff and Segundo understand, this God of love whom Jesus proclaims as Father is one whose love is preferential toward the poor, the suffering, those socially and religiously marginalized.[48] This praxis of love creates a crisis in the socio-political situation. Sobrino understands that Jesus does not limit his praxis of love to a recognition of the universality of sin. "Jesus does not invoke this universal theological truth to avoid spelling out clearly who is oppressor and who is oppressed in a given concrete situation".[49] In this manner the historical praxis of Jesus is a praxis of crisis wherein the Father's love is made concrete in an option for the poor and oppressed. It is a love which takes sides in a socio-political situation. This will become more explicit when we examine the Kingdom of God in Jesus' historical praxis.

Niebuhrian theology agrees with Liberation christology that love is the law of life and that Jesus Christ incarnates this *agape* in human life and history. Where Niebuhr disagrees with Liberation christology is concerning the emphasis and role of divine love. Niebuhr presents the love in Jesus as an 'impossible possibility'. It is a transcendent love which is impossible to human beings and only possible to God. This divine *agape* in Jesus brings judgment on all forms of human love and reveals them to be permeated with self-regard and sin. As Niebuhr states concerning Jesus;

> The final majesty, the ultimate freedom, and the perfect disinterestedness of the divine love can have a counterpart in history only in a life which ends tragically, because it refuses to participate in the claims and counterclaims of historical existence.[50]

And again.

> His ethical doctrine contains an uncompromising insistence upon conformity to God's will without reference to the relativities and contingencies of historical situations. The animating purpose of his life is to conform to the *agape* of God.[51]

Niebuhr is concerned to maintain the 'historical Jesus' as a symbol of God's absolute and transcendent love. A love which confronts human beings as both mercy and judgement. Liberation christology is not opposed to this transcendent dimension of divine love. Rather, Liberation christology calls this exclusive 'impossible possibility' into question. Niebuhr is subject to the criticism that he tends to portray Jesus exclusively in absolute terms. According to Niebuhr, Jesus makes impossible demands on human beings; "Jesus ... made demands upon the human spirit, which no finite man can fulfil, without explicitly admitting this situation".[52] And lived out an ideal of love which can only exist as suffering love in human history. Liberation christology is concerned to demonstrate the 'possible' found in the 'historical Jesus'. In examining the historical praxis of Jesus, Liberation christology understands love to be more than suffering love and 'impossible possibility'. They understand love to be a functional commitment to the poor and oppressed in a way which is a 'possibility', not only for Jesus in the relativities of his historical context, but also for us as we follow Jesus in his praxis. Liberation theologians understand that the divine love in Jesus causes him to take sides in socio-political conflict. This exegesis by Liberation theologians calls into question Niebuhr's abstracted symbol of the 'historical Jesus'.

Another way of defining Jesus' ministry and mission is through the concept of the Kingdom of God. As stated above, this concept defines Jesus' ministry in operational and historical terms. Liberation theologians understand that the Kingdom of God was central to the praxis of Jesus. As Sobrino states; "The most certain historical datum about Jesus' life is that the concept which dominated his preaching, the reality which gave meaningfulness to all his activity, was 'the kingdom of God'".[53] This Kingdom of God is defined by Boff as following;

> The kingdom of God is the realization of a fundamental utopia of the human heart, the total transfiguration of this world, free from all that alienates human beings, free from pain, sin, divisions, and death. ...
> The kingdom of God is a total, global and structural transfiguration and revolution of the reality of human beings; it is the cosmos purified of all evils and full of the reality of God.[54]

Sobrino understands that there is a dialectic relationship between Jesus and the Kingdom of God. Both the Kingdom of God and Jesus must be understood in relation to one another. Jesus' identity and mission are to be understood in relation to the God's reign and the historical future. Without this dimension Jesus becomes separated from the historical and prophetic faith of Judaism. But in like manner, the definitive Kingdom of God is only revealed in the praxis of Jesus. In this way Sobrino is careful to define the Kingdom of God as a dynamic reality pertaining to the reign of God. It is not to be understood as a static entity.[55]

For Liberation theologians, Jesus' preaching and actions are not simply declarations concerning the existence of the Kingdom of God. Rather they understand that in Jesus' person the Kingdom of God has arrived. Miranda perceives that this is what makes Jesus' praxis 'goodnews'.

> According to Jesus and the New Testament authors this *fact that* the kingdom is arriving is the truth believed, the object of faith. Everyone knew that there was going to be a kingdom of God. Everyone knew that there had to be an *eschaton*. No one doubted that there had to be a Messiah. All that was easy to accept, for it belongs to the unreal realm of concepts. But that all this was really happening, that it was becoming present reality -- that is what the Pharisees, the conservatives, the establishment refused to accept.[56]

Thus it is to be understood that in the teaching and actions of Jesus the Kingdom of God is being realized. As Boff states;

> With Christ the kingdom has already begun to act in the world. The old order is already moving in the direction of its end. A sun has arisen that knows no setting; the time of liberation has already made its breakthrough.[57]

Different Liberation theologians express this same insight in different ways. Rubem Alves speaks of the politics of God, of power that invades history.[58] Segundo understands that Jesus has set in motion mechanisms that are constitutive of the reign of God.[59] All these theologians understand that the miracles in Jesus' ministry are the signs of the Kingdom of God as transforming and dynamic power.[60]

This transforming power of the Kingdom is not a possibility of human agency. Both Boff and Sobrino understand that the Kingdom depends on God's initiative and comes from beyond the contingencies of history. As Boff states;

> When we say that the Kingdom of God expresses man's utopian longing, we do not mean to convey the idea that the Kingdom is a mere organic extension of this world, as it is encountered in history. The Kingdom does not evolve, but breaks in. If it were the evolution of present possibilities, it would never surpass the situation of the present, which is always ambiguous, with the wheat and the darnel growing together.[61]

This presence of the Kingdom in Jesus' praxis is not to be understood as the final and ultimate realization of God's reign. It may indicate and to some extent realize that reign, but it is not the eschatological Kingdom. As Segundo understands, the Kingdom in Jesus' ministry exhibits a partial power. It does not transform the world but leaves this to future divine initiative.[62] Boff understands that there is a dialectical tension in Jesus' presentation of the Kingdom as present and as future.

> In Jesus we find this dialectical tension properly maintained. On the one hand he proclaims a project of total liberation: the kingdom of God. On the other hand he displays mediating gestures, actions, and attitudes that translate this project into the ongoing process of history. On the one hand the kingdom is a future reality yet to come; on the other hand it is present and near at hand.[63]

This Kingdom of God which is actualized in Jesus' praxis is both good news and judgement. In an absolute sense it is judgement on all human endeavour. As Sobrino states;

> God's kingdom does not confirm the present reality of humankind and its history; rather, it passes judgement on that reality in

> order to re-create it. This crisis may be interpreted in many different categories: temporal, existential, situational, or practical. They all share the notion that people and history cannot go on as before in the face of this proclamation of the kingdom. No longer permitted to follow the old routine, people and history must change.[64]

The understanding of the Kingdom of God as eschatological judgement does not prevent Sobrino from making an analysis of concrete socio-political realities as relative approximations or rejections of the Kingdom. It is in this regard that Sobrino understands sin. Sin is not against God in the abstract, but against the reign of God.

> The twofold commandment of loving God and neighbour is clearly grounded in the logic of the kingdom. Sin is no longer seen as directed against God but rather against the kingdom of God. Divine filiation is broken because human brotherhood is broken.[65]

This Kingdom of God is also specifically goodnews for some and judgement for others in the context of a socio-political environment. Segundo makes this clear.

> ... important is the fact that *the kingdom itself* cannot be preached indiscriminately as *good news*, as *gospel*. The kingdom is destined for certain groups. It is theirs. It belongs to them. Only for them will it be a cause for joy. And, according to Jesus, the dividing line between joy and woe produced by the kingdom runs between *the poor* and *the rich*.[66]

According to this understanding of the Kingdom, it is judgement to oppressors and the powerful and good news to the marginalized, the poor, the oppressed, and the powerless. Sobrino presents this partiality in the Kingdom as fundamental to Jesus' praxis.

> Despite the gratuitous nature of the approaching kingdom, Jesus performs acts and gestures indicative of the kingdom's presence or dawning approach. His most fundamental gesture is taking sides with human beings in a concrete situation where the existing politico-religious structure has dehumanized people. It has turned those with power into brutes, while alienating and oppressing everyone else. Jesus does all he can to concretize and make present real love as the quintessence of the kingdom.[67]

Niebuhrian theology is in agreement with much of Liberation theology as regards the Kingdom of God. As divine love and human love

are organically related, so too is the eschatological Kingdom and the partial realizations of the Kingdom in history. Niebuhr is in agreement with Boff that dialectical tension is maintained between the presence of the Kingdom in history and the final realization of the Kingdom at the end of history.

> The kingdom of truth is ... not the kingdom of some other world. It is the picture of what this world ought to be. This kingdom is thus not of this world, in so far as the world is constantly denying the fundamental laws of human existence. Yet it is of this world. It is not some realm of eternal perfection which has nothing to do with historical existence. It constantly impinges upon man's every decision and is involved in every action.[68]

With this understanding of the Kingdom, Niebuhrian theology agrees with Liberation theology that the Kingdom is a source of judgement and crisis that demands socio-political response.

> The Kingdom of God is relevant to every movement of history as an ideal possibility and as a principle of judgement upon present realities. Sometimes it must be obeyed in defiance of the world, though such obedience means crucifixion and martyrdom. Sometimes courageous obedience forces the evil of the world to yield, thus making a new and higher justice in history possible. Sometimes the law of the Kingdom must be mixed with the forces of nature which operate in the world, to effect at least a partial mitigation of oppression.[69]

While Niebuhrian theology agrees with Liberation theology in principle concerning the relevance of the Kingdom of God to current history, Niebuhr does not develop this understanding christologically. Niebuhr maintains that Jesus is the disclosure of the hidden sovereignty of God in history and the disclosure of the fulfilment of that sovereignty in the eschatological future. In this manner he emphasizes that Jesus is the disclosure of meaning.

> Prophetic and apocalyptic hopes anticipated an end which would both disclose and establish the sovereignty of God; which would both reveal the meaning of life and fulfil it. In Jesus' own reinterpretation, these two facets of history's culmination are, at least partially, separated. The indication of this separation is given in the double affirmation on the one hand that the 'Kingdom of God has come' and on the other hand that the 'Kingdom of God will come'. On the one hand, history has reached its culmination in the disclosure of the hidden sovereignty of God and

> the revelation of the meaning of life and history. On the other hand history is still waiting for its culmination in the second coming of the triumphant Messiah.[70]

With this emphasis on meaning, Niebuhr maintains Jesus and Kingdom of God as symbols which serve as ethical ideals in relation to historical endeavour. This means that Niebuhr does not develop a reading of the 'historical Jesus' and the Kingdom which includes involvement in the ambiguities and relativities of socio-political life. He develops an understanding of this involvement for those who live under the disclosure in Jesus of the Kingdom as an ideal. But he does not develop this socio-political involvement in the life and ministry of Jesus himself. Thus, Niebuhr does not emphasize the commitment of Jesus and the Kingdom of God in relation to the poor and oppressed. He maintains Jesus and the Kingdom as relational ideals that serve as points of judgement and ethical stimulus. In maintaining the Kingdom of God as the symbol of 'hidden sovereignty' Niebuhr can be seen to be neglecting the operational side of the Kingdom of God in the praxis of Jesus which includes the taking of sides in socio-political conflict.

It is appropriate at this point to examine in detail how Liberation christology understands Jesus to be involved in this socio-political conflict. Liberation theologians recognize that Jesus' praxis is primarily prophetic and religious and seeks the liberation of human beings. And because this prophetic and religious praxis seeks liberation, it also has a political dimension. As Croatto states: "Jesus' praxis is *prophetical* -- denouncing oppressive evil and proclaiming the liberation of the oppressed -- but with a necessary reference to politics".[71]

Central to this religio-political understanding of Jesus' teaching and activity is the use of power. Liberation theology understands that Jesus rejects two popular understandings of the Kingdom of God and the power associated with the establishment of those respective kingdoms. The first of these means of establishing the Kingdom is that held by the Zealots. This is the way of violent revolution resulting in the overthrow of Roman domination. Liberation theologians understand that Jesus rejected this use of coercive power. They understand that he

rejected the way of the Zealots for two reasons. The first reason is that the project of the Zealots would reduce the Kingdom of God to the horizon of Jewish nationalism. Croatto makes clear that he perceives in Jesus a rejection of this reduction.

> ...Jesus did nothing we know of to liberate the Jews from the Roman yoke. It appears that he made no political and nationalist commitment like that of the Zealots. When all things are put in perspective, it is precisely here that we see his lucidity and his greatness. Had he been a revolutionary leader on the *surface* of the revolution, he would have been doing *the Jews* a favour -- but his activity would have been exhausted on this political, racial, and geographical level.[72]

The second reason why Jesus is understood to reject the project of the Zealots is because the use of coercive power is alien to the love found in the Father and the Kingdom of God. Sobrino and Boff understand that God's love does not dominate or coerce. The Kingdom that Jesus' embodies in his praxis is not one established through imposition or force, but rather comes as grace. As Sobrino states;

> According to Jesus ... God's coming was an act of grace. He did not espouse religious nationalism or political theocratism. The basic temptation facing him and others was the temptation to establish God's kingdom through the use of political power. The only true power in Jesus' eyes was the power embodied in truth and love.[73]

Sobrino understands that Jesus rejects the idea that God possesses and wields power in history. He understands that power in history tends to be oppressive in fact and therefore cannot be the ultimate mediation of God. As Sobrino states; "Over against the notion of God as power Jesus sets the notion of God as love".[74]

The second popular understanding of the Kingdom of God which Jesus rejects is that held by the Jewish religious authorities. In this conflict Jesus rejects a kingdom established by obedience to religious legalism. Jesus is against 'tradition' when it puts distance and difficulty between people and the Kingdom. As Croatto states;

> Jesus initiates his program of liberation by *redeeming human beings* rescuing them from the structural power of the law, from the 'traditions' and from the marginalizing prejudices of institution, sect, race, and religion. He denounces the

> legalistic 'justice' of the Pharisees ... and the perverted and alienating 'authority' of the Sadducees.[75]

It is in this confrontation that we perceive the religio-political praxis of Jesus. Liberation theologians understand that this confrontation was not merely 'religious'. It was a confrontation with the social fabric and structures of domination maintained by religious authorities. Thus, to confront the religious authorities was to call into question the systems and structures which also had political and economic dimensions. Ellacuría perceives the 'cleansing of the temple' as an example of this religio-political praxis.

> Any action touching religion was perforce an action touching public life, and although Jesus' immediate emphasis was not upon the socio-political but upon the socio-religious, his action could not have been interpreted as anything short of a grave act of interference with the prevailing power structure.
>
> The clearest proof of this is that those who dominated the religion of Israel, and through it the social structure and life of the people, saw in Jesus, just as they had in John the Baptist, a major threat to their preeminence and power. By attacking their monopoly of faith in Yahweh, by impugning the need for their mediation in an individual's encounter with God, Jesus was undermining the power of the priestly establishment. More than this, he was placing in danger ... the delicate balance between the people and the power of the Romans, within which equilibrium the Jewish authorities were manoeuvering in order to maintain themselves in their acquired status. Finally, he endangered the source of their income, as can be appreciated in the cleansing of the temple.[76]

It is because of this praxis of prophetic confrontation with religious authority and its structures and systems of domination that Liberation theologians can describe Jesus as a religio-political agitator[77], reformer[78], and revolutionary[79]. It is in this regard that Ellacuria and Segundo understand that Jesus was more 'political' and more of a threat than the Zealots. While the Zealots were concerned with the overt dimensions of political power, Jesus undermined the religio-social foundations of the systems and structures of power. His attack was on the social fabric that supported religious authority and gave it legitimacy.[80]

As has been stated before, Jesus' socio-political praxis is realized by 'taking sides' within a social context of conflict. It is

this 'taking sides' which creates the political dimension in Jesus' ministry. Sobrino understands that it is this political dimension which makes love relevant.

> Jesus' universal love is 'political' in that it seeks to be real and effective in a given concrete situation. That is why Jesus' *universal* love takes different concrete forms, depending on the situation. He manifests his love for the oppressed by being *with* them, by offering them something that might restore their dignity and make them truly human. He manifests his love for the oppressors by being *against* them, by trying to strip away all that is making them less than human. In short, Jesus' love is political because it is situated in the concrete. It is proclamation and hope, denunciation and anathema.[81]

This understanding of religio-political praxis and 'power' both agrees and disagrees with Niebuhrian theology. Niebuhr agrees with Liberation theology that Jesus was a prophetic presence and was a threat to the power of the priests.[82] He also agrees that Jesus rejected messianic expectations of both the Zealots and the Jewish religious authorities.[83] And he is in agreement that Jesus rejected the use of coercive power. The difference that Niebuhr has with Liberation christology is the degree to which Jesus is understood to embody powerlessness.

> It is impossible to symbolize the divine goodness in history in any other way than by complete powerlessness, or rather by a consistent refusal to use power in the rivalries of history. For there is no self in history or society, no matter how impartial its perspective upon the competitions of life, which can rise to the position of a disinterested participation in those rivalries and competitions. It can symbolize disinterested love only by a refusal to participate in the rivalries. Any participation in them means the assertion of one ego interest against another.[84]

For this reason Niebuhr is concerned to present Jesus as the 'suffering servant' who in powerlessness represents the disinterested love of God.

> Jesus' own conception of history was that all men and nations were involved in rebellion against God and that therefore the Messiah would have to be, not so much a strong and good ruler who would help the righteous to be victorious over the unrighteous, but a 'suffering servant' who would symbolize and reveal the mercy of God; for only the divine forgiveness could finally overcome the contradictions of history and the enmity between man and God.[85]

Here again we can see where Niebuhr emphasizes the 'historical Jesus' as the symbol of suffering love. While there is agreement between Niebuhrian christology and Liberation christology on the rejection of coercive power, there is not agreement on other dimensions of 'power'. Niebuhr understands that disinterested divine love must be removed from the rivalries and competitions of social life. Liberation theology understands just the opposite. Liberation theology understands that disinterested love is not concrete unless it enters into the rivalries and competitions of social life for the sake of all parties involved. It is interesting to note that Niebuhr's theology agrees with this understanding of love and social involvement. It is his christology that emphasizes a passive suffering love in order to maintain the 'historical Jesus' as the symbol of impartial grace that imparts forgiveness to sinful collective humanity. This emphasis means that the partiality of the 'historical Jesus' in his socio-political context is neglected.

In concluding this section on the ministry of Jesus it is appropriate to examine Sobrino's developmental understanding of Jesus' praxis. As has already been stated, Sobrino understands that an examination of the 'historical Jesus' is an examination of Jesus' faith. This faith is composed of a basic trust and confidence in God as Father and a commitment to the mission of making the Kingdom of God present. Sobrino perceives that this faith as praxis is fundamentally historical and is therefore subject to relative knowledge and social conflict. This historical dimension of faith and praxis necessitates change and growth in Jesus' awareness and practice of his mission. Sobrino maintains that we can observe two distinct phases in Jesus' ministry. In the initial phase of Jesus' ministry he can be perceived as an orthodox Jew fulfilling the prophetic role of Hebrew tradition. In this role Jesus proclaims and anticipates the Kingdom of God. This is done through his teaching, miracles, and forgiveness of sins. In this praxis, Jesus demonstrates that he is in service of the Kingdom and that his prophetic condemnation of sin is that of sin against the Kingdom and God's coming. In this phase, sin is understood as

rejection of the future and the reign of God. At this point Jesus understands the Kingdom to be immanent in time.[86]

Sobrino understands that this embodiment of Jesus' faith through prophetic praxis reaches a crisis which requires a reinterpretation. He calls this the 'crisis in Galilee'.

> It is given that geographical label because Jesus abandons the heart of Galilee, heading first to Caesarea Philippi and then toward the ten towns of the Decapolis on the borders of Syria and Phoenicia. This geographical break in Jesus' activity expresses an even deeper break in the person of Jesus himself. Jesus comes to realize that he has failed in his mission as he had previously understood it. The crowds are abandoning him, the religious leaders of the Jewish people will not accept him, and God is not getting any closer with power to renovate reality. So there is a real break in both the internal awareness and the external activity of Jesus.[87]

In this crisis Jesus is tempted to close his heart to his mission.

> Jesus comes to see clearly that his historical way of living out his trust in the Father and his obedience to his mission cannot proceed according to its old logic. He is tempted to withdraw into seclusion, to picture his mission more in terms of some restricted sect. That is why the Gospels talk about him withdrawing from his usual geographical haunts and heading to more distant regions. This geographical retreat symbolizes the temptation to close his heart to his mission. Jesus does overcome that temptation, but it will entail a radical change in his understanding of himself and his mission.[88]

This reinterpretation of his faith and praxis means that he comes to a new understanding of his relationship to God as Father and a new understanding of how he is to make the Kingdom of God present.

> The referential pole of his life continues to be the Father. He continues to have confidence in him, but now that confidence finds nothing in which to root. It becomes a confidence or trust against trust. ... Fidelity to the Father now stands in the presence, not of the Father's imminent coming, but of Jesus' imminent death. And Jesus sees his death as the death of his cause. Letting God remain God now lacks any verification; it is done in the absence of any verification at all.
>
> Insofar as the kingdom of God is concerned, Jesus no longer sees its imminent arrival. He also realizes that people have rejected it as an ideal. His work in favour of the kingdom no longer means placing all that he has at its disposal but rather placing all that he himself is at its disposal. He must surrender

his ideas and his person, accepting death. The power which he displayed at the start of his public life, and which was concretely embodied in his miracles, has now proved to be ineffective. All that is left is the power of love in suffering.

His attitude toward sin is no longer embodied in the analysis and prophetic denunciation of a sinful situation. Jesus must now shoulder the very burden of sin.[89]

Sobrino understands that this shift in Jesus' praxis and self-understanding means that Jesus now takes on the role of the 'suffering servant' of Yahweh and that the Kingdom of God now has its focus in Jesus. Jesus is now the new and painful way into the Kingdom and eschatological salvation is determined by a person's stance in relation to Jesus himself.[90] Sobrino also perceives that this new praxis also entails intensification of the temptation to resolve conflict through coercive power. This temptation reaches its peak at Gethsemane.

After the Galilean crisis we see the growing intensification of Jesus' conflicts. He has serious disputes with the priests, and he drives the merchants out of the temple. Jesus realizes that his life in in great jeopardy, and his disciples are now armed. It is in this concrete context that he agonizes over the use of power and feels the full weight of the temptation in that direction. It truly seems that only the use of force can save him. The agony in the garden is poles apart from any serene perplexity. It is the total, absolute crisis of the logic of the kingdom with which Jesus commenced his public life. Overcoming this temptation no longer means some intentional overcoming of the power of Satan as it did at the start of his public life; now it means succumbing to Satan's power. Luke puts it in a bold phrase: 'This is your hour -- the triumph of darkness!' (Luke 22:53). The temptation cannot be overcome by fleeing from the conflictive situation and the public gaze, by going off and forming some isolated sect. It can only be overcome by immersing oneself in it and allowing oneself to be affected by the power of sin.[91]

In comparison with Niebuhrian christology there is little that can be said in relation to this developmental understanding of Jesus' praxis. As has already been noted, Niebuhr's christology emphasizes this latter praxis of Jesus, emphasizing his role as suffering servant and the embodiment of suffering love. The question can be raised from Sobrino's perspective as to whether Niebuhr has neglected the first phase of Jesus' praxis which proclaims and anticipates the Kingdom of God in history.

This developmental understanding of Jesus' ministry brings us to the point where we can now move to examine the death of Jesus.

"Historical Jesus": death of Jesus

Jon Sobrino understands that; "At the very centre of Christian faith lies the assertion that Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, died by crucifixion".[92] This statement recognizes that the Cross is to be understood from two interpretive perspectives. The first perspective is what Sobrino calls a 'slice of real history'. This 'slice of real history' is "something that happened to a concrete human being who lived the nearness of God and a life of service to human beings as no one ever had before".[93] The second perspective is that the Cross and death of Jesus is to be understood as a theological symbol.

This twofold reading of the death of Jesus is necessitated by the dialectical relationship which exists between the Cross and resurrection. Sobrino and Boff both understand that the Cross and resurrection must be understood in relation to one another.[94] Boff understands that the death of Jesus is a historically ambiguous event which only becomes clarified in light of the resurrection.[95] Thus, any reading of the death of the 'historical Jesus' will also include a theological reading of this event. In the following we will be concerned initially with the 'slice of history' and subsequently with the symbolic reading of the death of Jesus.

Both Boff and Sobrino perceive the Cross and death of Jesus to be historical in the broadest sense of the word. They both reject the theological understanding of the death of Jesus on the Cross as a trans-historical divine decision. For Boff and Sobrino, the Cross and the death of Jesus is the result of the specific historical realities surrounding Jesus' life. It is the result of Jesus' decision to live out God's love and embody the Kingdom of God within the relative socio-political realities of first century Palestine. As Sobrino states; "The cross is not the result of some divine decision independent of history; it is the outcome of the basic option for incarnation in a given situation".[96]

In this historical understanding of the Cross and the death of Jesus there can be perceived both continuity and discontinuity in relation to Jesus' mission. Alves, Miranda, Segundo, Boff, Sobrino and Gutiérrez all recognize that the continuity in Jesus' life and death is that of religio-political conflict.[97] Jesus confronted and threatened the power and privilege of the religio-political authorities. In this manner, Boff and Sobrino understand Jesus to die the death of a prophet in continuity with his life mission.[98] Segundo makes explicit this prophetic and political dimension of Jesus' life and death.

> ... Jesus, once he was in Jerusalem, did nothing to dispel the fatal misunderstanding that would necessarily picture him as a political agitator; it explains why he did the very opposite, in fact. He makes no effort to dispel the misunderstanding because there is no such misunderstanding. When he is delivered into the hands of men, it is because his message has reached its natural goal, because it has been completely comprehended.[99]

Liberation theologians understand that the Cross is no accident in the life of Jesus. It is the consequence of his life work. It is an end which he has provoked and chosen. As Boff states;

> Jesus chose and embraced death freely. He did not accept it as a biological fate; instead he freely sacrificed his own life in order to bear witness to his message. 'No one takes it from me. I lay it down freely' (John 10:18). His death is witness, not punishment; free choice, not fate.[100]

In this manner, Jesus' death by crucifixion is understood to be in continuity with the self-giving love and voluntary suffering which marked his conflictual life.

But Liberation theologians also understand that there is discontinuity between Jesus' mission and his death. While Jesus died the death of a prophet, Sobrino understands that he did not die the death of a martyr. He understands that there is distinct discontinuity between Jesus' life and his death. "... Jesus dies in total *discontinuity* with his life and cause. The death he experienced was not only the death of his person but also the death of his cause".[101] Sobrino perceives this discontinuity in relation to Jesus' message about the nearness of God and the immanent arrival of the Kingdom. His

death stands in contradiction to his cause and message. Jesus is left to face death in trust and faith in God in spite of the seeming absence of God. Boff and Sobrino both agree that Jesus died abandoned by the Father. As Sobrino states; "Jesus dies *as the Son*, as the one who proclaimed the nearness of his heavenly Father and then died completely abandoned by that Father".[102] This is the scandal of the Cross and of Jesus' death. This is also the source of ambiguity in Jesus' death which only becomes clarified in the light of the resurrection.

In accepting the Cross, Jesus expressed his hope and faith in the Father in spite of God's seeming absence and the death of his cause and work. Boff understands that Jesus becomes a totally liberated self in this approach to death. The Cross marks the ultimate expression of Jesus' self-giving to, and faith in, God.[103]

Liberation theologians interpret Jesus' acceptance of death in different ways. As examined in the previous section, Sobrino recognizes that Jesus accepts the role of the 'suffering servant of Yahweh'. While most Liberation theologians recognize that Jesus accepted this role, they differ on their interpretation of his motive for acceptance of a role that leads to death. Sobrino understands that Jesus accepts this role because it is the only way to remain faithful to God in a situation where people wanted a very different God. In remaining faithful to God he embodies the trial of this God concerning the true nature of God and the true essence of power.[104] Boff understands Jesus' acceptance of death in a manner which corresponds to Sobrino's interpretation. Boff perceives that Jesus accepts death as imposed on him by historical circumstances. Yet Boff also understands that Jesus embraces this death in his own free will in fidelity to the cause of God. For Boff, it is Jesus' faithfulness in self-giving love which leads him inevitably into conflict, arrest, and death by crucifixion.[105] Segundo embraces the most extreme interpretation of Jesus' acceptance of death. He understands that Jesus accepts the route to persecution and death because of its long term critical affect on dominant ideologies. He perceives Jesus' decision as one concerned with efficacy. He also speculates that Jesus may not have really believed that this route would actually lead to

death. He speculates that perhaps Jesus thought the Kingdom would intervene or that he thought he had more time.[106]

Niebuhrian theology is in agreement with Liberation theology when it recognizes that the death of Jesus is the result of his self-giving love. Niebuhr recognizes that it is Jesus' self-giving love which leads him to the ultimate expression of love in self-sacrifice. Niebuhr differs from Liberation theology in that he neglects the socio-political processes surrounding this death. Niebuhr's primary concern is with the Cross as a theological symbol rather than as a socio-political event. For this reason he narrows the historical dimension of Jesus' life to the insight that self-giving love in history leads him to the Cross. This primary concern with the theological symbol of the Cross almost leads him to give the Cross and death of Jesus exclusive meaning independent of the life and work of Jesus. As Niebuhr states concerning Jesus;

> The animating purpose of his life is to conform to the *agape* of God. His life culminates in an act of self-abnegation in which the individual will ceases to be a protagonist of the individual life; and the life ends upon the Cross. The Cross could not have the symbolic significance for Christian faith if the life and doctrine were not consistent with it. But on the other hand the Cross symbolizes the perfection of love more consistently than any cumulation of individual acts.[107]

Niebuhr's christology can easily be described as a christology of the Cross. He is concerned that this Cross be historical, but he does not explore the various dimensions of that history. His primary concern is with the Cross as a theological symbol of divine self-giving love. It is therefore appropriate at this point to place Niebuhr in comparison with Liberation theology as regards the Cross and death of Jesus as theological symbol.

As already stated, the Cross and death of Jesus is to be read as both a 'slice of history' and as theological symbol. It is to be read as theological symbol because, as Sobrino states; "... the resurrection turns the cross into an ever open question about God".[108] Thus, the Cross is subject to interpretation concerning its significance in relation to God.

An initial meaning of the Cross as symbol is that it signifies the human relationship to God as that of confrontation. Boff understands that the Cross reveals human self-empowerment and self-sufficiency which rejects God and God's project of liberation.

> The cross is the symbol of what the world can do, with its piety (pious people, not bad people, condemned Jesus), with its zeal for God and with its dogma and its revelation, understood as self-sufficient models. The cross is a paradigm of a set of priorities based on self-sufficiency, and organized as a power or religion. These involved the rejection of the future, of the kingdom as the totality of liberation and of Jesus as the forerunner and bearer of this liberation.[109]

As Boff states; "The cross was the real symbol of the kingdom of man".[110]

In a similar line of thought Sobrino understands that the Cross confronts our conception of God and reveals the human tendency to create a god which conforms to our interests and goals.

> There is actually a *contradiction* between the true God and the knowing subject who approaches the cross. The first thing that the cross reveals about God is human *hubris*: People fashion images of God that are in direct contradiction to the real God.[111]

This brings us to second meaning of the Cross as symbol. It is a revelation of God. Sobrino and Alves agree that the Cross signifies a God who suffers with and for human beings in history.[112] For Sobrino this is the revelation of divine love.

> On the cross God's love for humanity is expressed in truly historical terms rather than in idealistic ones. Historical love presupposes activity, but it also presupposes passivity because it is love situated in a contradictory structure that makes its force and power felt. The passivity involved here is that of letting oneself be affected by all that is negative, by injustice and death.[113]

For both Sobrino and Alves, this suffering love is the key to understanding God's relationship to history. By means of suffering love God negates the negative within human history. As Sobrino states;

> On the cross God does not show up as one who wields power over the negative from *outside*; rather, on the cross we see God submerged

within the negative. The possibility of overcoming the negative is realized by submersion within the mechanisms and processes of the negative.'[114]

This is not to say that either Sobrino or Alves understand that suffering love in history will at any point eliminate the negative in history. Both understand this to be an eschatological solution. But they do understand divine suffering love to be an ongoing source in history for the negation of the negative in history. As Alves states; "Because God has elected himself for history and man, his sufferings will continue, with man and history, until the end of the world".'[115]

Sobrino understands the Cross to be the symbol of both God's contradiction of humanity and of God's solidarity with humanity through suffering love. He understands that the Cross symbolizes a process in the life of God wherein God is immersed in history and history brought into God.

> The cross suggests that the reality of God may be viewed as a process that is open to the world. Through the Son, God actively incorporates himself into the historical process; through the Spirit, human beings and history are incorporated into God himself. Thus human life can be described as a participation in God's process.'[116]

It is at this point that Niebuhrian theology comes into conflict with Liberation theology. While Niebuhrian theology agrees with many of the insights of Liberation theology concerning the symbolic significance of the Cross, it can not agree with Sobrino's concept of divine suffering love as historical process. In opposition to Sobrino's position, Niebuhr understands the Cross to signify God's agency in history from beyond history. Niebuhr emphasizes the transcendent rather than the immanent divine immersion in historical process. For Niebuhr there is no negation of the negative in history. The negation of the negative comes from beyond history and is ultimately realized beyond history. This transhistorical negation of the negative is called 'forgiveness'. Forgiveness has impact on human beings in history but it is not to be found in the process or structures of history.

> The significance of the affirmation that God is revealed in Christ, and more particularly in his Cross, is that the love (*agape*) of God is conceived in terms which make the divine involvement in history a consequence of precisely the divine transcendence over the structures of history. The final majesty of God is contained not so much in His power within the structures as in the power of His freedom over the structures, that is, over the *logos* aspects of reality. This freedom is the power of mercy beyond judgement. By this freedom He involves Himself in the guilt and suffering of free men who have, in their freedom, come in conflict with the structural character of reality. The *agape* of God is thus at once the expression of both the final majesty of God and His relation to history.'[117]

For Niebuhr the Cross signifies the divine judgement and mercy toward human beings. With Liberation theology, Niebuhrian theology agrees that the Cross is a symbol of judgement which reveals human pride and the rejection of God. It also agrees with Liberation theology that the God of the Cross is one who suffers with and for human beings. But Niebuhr emphasizes that the suffering of God is that of assuming human sin and the judgement which sin incurs. As Niebuhr states; "The good news of the gospel is that God takes the sinfulness of man into Himself, and overcomes in His own heart what cannot be overcome in human life, since human life remains within the vicious circle of sinful self-glorification on every level of moral advance".'[118] This is not to say that Niebuhrian theology rejects the Liberation idea that the Cross reveals divine solidarity with human suffering. Rather, it does reject this idea if solidarity means that human suffering is a dimension of a divine process in history.

In previous criticism of Niebuhr we indicated that his emphasis on the Cross as the symbol of divine self-giving tends to lead him to neglect the historical dimensions of the life and death of Jesus. While this indicates a weakness in terms of historical breadth, it also must be recognized that this emphasis on the symbolic nature of the Cross has certain strengths. Niebuhr's understanding of the Cross, as the revelation of divine *agape* exercised in judgement and mercy, creates a symbol which is transhistorical and which stands beyond the continual debates concerning the historicity of, or portrayal of, the 'historical Jesus'. In the Cross of Jesus Niebuhr finds a perfection of divine *agape* which is historically relevant and yet is not

historically relative. It stands as a transcendent norm which is universally applicable in human history as the source of judgement and mercy.

> The Cross symbolizes the perfection of *agape* which transcends all particular norms of justice and mutuality in history. It rises above history and seeks conformity to the Divine love rather than harmony with other human interests and vitalities. ... The Cross represents a transcendent perfection which clarifies obscurities of history and defines the limits and what is possible in historic development.'[119]

This difference between Niebuhrian theology and Liberation theology concerning the role of history will become more explicit as we examine the resurrection of Jesus.

"Historical Jesus": resurrection of Jesus

Liberation theologians are concerned that the Cross and resurrection be seen as one salvific event. This concern is founded in light of the historical separation of the Cross and resurrection in the traditional christologies of Latin America. Hugo Assmann is representative of this concern. He perceives traditional christologies as separating the Cross and resurrection and applying these to different social groups. In this traditional use of christology, the Christ of the Cross is the Christ of the poor and oppressed. The crucified Christ represents the impotence, defeat, sacrifice, and sorrow, which is the destiny of the poor. In like manner, the resurrected Christ, the Christ who is the ascended Lord and King, is the Christ for those in power.'[120] It is for this reason that Liberation theologians are concerned to maintain that the resurrected Christ, the Christ of faith, is none other than the 'historical Jesus' who suffered persecution and death. For Sobrino it is not important that someone was resurrected. Rather, it is important that Jesus in particular was resurrected because he also was condemned, executed, and abandoned.'[121]

In the examination of the death of Jesus we began with historical considerations related to the Cross. With the resurrection of Jesus we

begin with the same concern. Alves, Segundo, Boff, and Sobrino, all understand that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is not an event subject to scientific historical verification.[122] As Boff states, the resurrection can only be grasped by faith.

> At this point, historians are of little use to us. The resurrection is not an ordinary historical fact capable of being grasped by historians. It is a fact grasped only by faith.[123]

This recognition of the limitation of historical verifiability does not mean that Liberation theologians deny the literal resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Rather, it is central to their christology that the 'historical Jesus' was raised from the dead by God. Boff is representative of this acceptance of the resurrection as an event in the life of Jesus to which his followers became witnesses.

> The resurrection is not the theological creation of some enthusiastic follower of the person from Nazareth. Faith in the resurrection is the fruit of the impact on the apostles of the apparitions of the living Lord. They were startled and overcome by this impact that was beyond their capacities of representation. Without this, they would never have been a church, worship, nor glory given to the name of this prophet from Nazareth. Much less would there have been the greatest witness to this truth: the martyrdom of so many in the early church.[124]

Boff understands that it is only because of the resurrection that the process of christological reflection is possible. The resurrection necessitates a re-interpretation of what was apparently the failed cause of a Jewish prophet. The resurrection forces a re-evaluation concerning Jesus' ministry, his person, and the significance of his death. Sobrino understands that the resurrection is the perspective from which the soteriological import of Jesus' life and death become apparent. It is also from this perspective that the theological affirmation that Jesus is the Son of God becomes a possibility.[125]

This brings us to consider the theological significance of this event. One theological aspect of the resurrection is that of eschatological promise. Sobrino understands that while the resurrection is narrated as a historical event, it is primarily an eschatological event. He understands that the resurrection can be

termed 'historical' because it is the fulfilment of the definitive promise of God and indicates the future as promise.'[126] Segundo also perceives the resurrection in this manner.

> The narratives of Jesus' appearances are not historical: not because they are false but because they are *more than historical*. They belong to the eschatological plane, the plane where the meaning of history is judged and verified.'[127]

In this manner the resurrection is not only the verification of Jesus' life, ministry, and sacrificial death, it is also the source of hope in the historical future.

This hope in the historical future is concentrated around several theological affirmations in relation to the resurrection. The first of these is the assertion that in the resurrected Jesus we have revealed the destiny of human beings. Both Boff and Sobrino understand that God's ultimate word of love has been spoken in the resurrection of Jesus. In this event God has revealed the divine commitment to the transfiguration of human life. As Boff states;

> Human hope was realized in Jesus resurrected and is already being realized in each person. To the question: What is to become of humankind? Christian faith joyfully answers: resurrection, as total transfiguration of the human reality, both corporal and spiritual.'[128]

In this way Boff understands that the resurrected Jesus is the paradigm for human life and destiny.

> Death was overcome, all the latent capacities in being and human beings were realized, and the human person was inserted into the divine sphere. Christ became the new being, the new Adam, the new heaven and the new earth, the realization of human hopes for total, human-divine liberation and realization. Christ assumed a unique function in history: He became a reality-symbol and a *Gestalt* (type, profile) for us.'[129]

It is for these reasons that Boff and Sobrino want to emphasize the significance of the biblical image of the resurrected Jesus as the 'firstborn' of many brothers and sisters (Rom. 8:29; I Cor. 15:20; Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5; Acts 3:15).'[130]

A second theological assertion related to the resurrection of Jesus is that concerning God's relationship to history. Boff is a primary example of a Liberation theologian who perceives in Jesus' resurrection the revelation of a teleological force in history. For Boff, the resurrected Jesus is the last link in a historical and evolutionary process. In Jesus the future is guaranteed by God.[131] In Boff's interpretation, the resurrected Jesus is immanent in history and in all cosmic reality.

> The earthly Jesus, before the resurrection, was a prisoner to the coordinates of space and time, the limitations of a carnal body. Now, by means of the resurrection, the new man emerged, no longer carnal but pneumatic, for which the body is no longer a limit but total cosmic presence and communion with all reality. The resurrected Christ fills all reality, thus realizing to a maximum degree his being-in-others and his being-for-others.[132]

Boff understands that Jesus is the eschatological human being who reveals our future and who, in his presence in the present, draws us into that future.

> Christ, therefore, in our evolutionary perspective, is the Omega Point, that point where the whole process finds its goal in a personal being and hence is extrapolated into the divine sphere. In him God is already all in all (I Cor. 15:28) and the centre between God and creation. The human being whom God sought and who is fully his image and likeness (Gen. 1:26) is not so much that first man who emerged from the animal, but the eschatological human being who broke through to God at the end of the whole creational-evolutionary process. Christ, incarnate and resurrected, has the characteristics of the ultimate human being. The human being latent in the ascending process became patent in him: He is the *homo revelatus*. Hence he is the anticipated future, the end manifesting itself in the middle of the journey. Because of this he assumes a determining, motivating, integrating, orientating role and is the magnet that attracts those who are still in a painful and slow ascent toward God.[133]

Sobrino interprets the resurrection as revealing a historical dialectic of the future. Unlike Boff, his dialectic does not emphasize the immanence of the resurrected Jesus as a teleological force in history. Sobrino understands that the resurrection indicates that God has taken history into the divine self. But this relationship does not mean that God ceases to be transcendent. His transcendence is

expressed as future promise. Thus, Sobrino maintains a relatively stronger dialectic between the present and the future than is found in Boff's evolutionary position. Yet Sobrino also understands that history is in the process of fulfilment. He is careful to distinguish that this fulfilment is not a potentiality in the structure of history but rather comes as promise from the God of the future.

> The resurrection is a still unfinished reality. It is still in the process of fulfilment insofar as its saving efficacy is concerned. In its historical structure, then, the revelation of God effected in Christ's resurrection is a promise. His resurrection cannot be comprehended by broadening the meaning of some conception of history because it is not a possibility *in* the world and *in* history but a possibility *for* the world and *for* history.[134]

This understanding of the resurrection as a revelation of the dialectic relationship between the present and the future as promise leads to a third assertion concerning the significance of the resurrection. Liberation theologians understand the Cross and resurrection to illustrate an ongoing dialectic of human agency in history. Alves perceives this dialectic of the Cross and resurrection to be the ongoing politics of God. He understands the resurrected Jesus to be a 'factor' of history rather than a 'fact' of history. Participating in this dialectic means taking part in God's ongoing suffering in the world and also in God's power of love which negates the negative and opens up hope for the future.[135]

Boff also presents the relationship between the Cross and resurrection in this manner. He understands that the Cross indicates the 'kingdom of humanity' and that the resurrection indicates the liberating Kingdom of God. This dialectic between Cross and resurrection continues in history as human beings reject God's liberation or realize relative historical liberations.[136] Boff also understands that the resurrection has specific meaning in regard to those who give their lives within this dialectic process.

> The resurrection of the crucified Jesus shows that it is not meaningless to die for other human beings and God. In Jesus' resurrection, light is shed on the anonymous dead of all those who have lost out in history while fighting for the cause of justice and ultimate human meaningfulness.[137]

Similar to Alves and Boff, Sobrino also understands that the Cross and resurrection indicate a dialectic of human agency in history. The Cross is found in the love which continues to suffer in history and the resurrection is found in the promise which continually opens up the possibilities of history. At the centre of this Cross-resurrection dialectic is the power of love. Sobrino understands that it is this dialectic which maintains love as divine power in history. As Sobrino states; "Without the resurrection love would not be authentic power; without the cross this power would not be love".[138]

Niebuhrian theology agrees with much of Liberation theology as regards the resurrection. Niebuhr recognizes the significance of the resurrection in regard to the re-interpretation of Jesus' ministry and his death. He recognizes that the resurrection was fundamental for the creation of the Church. He also agrees that while the resurrection is not accessible through historical science, it never-the-less was the conviction of the early Church that it was a 'fact'. A 'fact' which he asserts can only be known by faith and repentance.[139]

Niebuhr also agrees with Liberation theology when it identifies the resurrected Jesus as the revelation of the future for human beings. It is concerning this topic that Niebuhr examines the idea of the general resurrection at the consummation of history. For Niebuhr the resurrection is a source of hope in a future wherein God completes the incompleteness of human life and history.[140]

Once again the difference between Liberation theology and Niebuhr concerns the relation of the resurrection to history. In opposition to a historical dialectic of the future, Niebuhr maintains a dialectic of transcendence. For Niebuhr the resurrection does not reveal a dialectic at work in history, but rather a dialectic which is trans-historical. In this regard the resurrected Jesus is the revelation of the *telos* which gives history its meaning and reveals its future. But at the same time the resurrected Jesus is also the revelation that history can not complete itself and that only divine transformation can bring history to its consummation. Therefore history must have a *finis* as well as a *telos*. For Niebuhr, this trans-historical 'end' is the only resolution for the ambiguities and distortions found in history.

For Niebuhr the resolution of the negative in history can never be achieved within history. Thus, the resurrection is the revelation of divine mercy and power which can and will resolve the problems of human history and existence.

> If ... the New Testament faith ends in the pinnacle of the hope of the resurrection this is also the final expression of a faith which sees no hope that man may overcome or escape the contingent character of his existence; yet is not without hope, for it is persuaded that a divine power and love has been disclosed in Christ, which will complete what man cannot complete; and which will overcome the evil introduced into human life and history by man's abortive effort to complete his life by his own wisdom and power.[141]

Corresponding to Niebuhrian criticism of Liberation theology concerning historical process, is the difference in the interpretation of the Cross and resurrection as a dialectic of human agency in history. Niebuhrian theology does agree with Liberation theology that the Cross continues to be expressed in human life. Niebuhr perceives that self-giving love will always be suffering love in history. Where Niebuhrian theology disagrees with Liberation theology is in the attempt to find a historical correspondence for the resurrection. For Niebuhr, the resurrection can only indicate the trans-historical resolution found in divine love and power. Thus, the dialectic of Cross and resurrection is not a dialectic of agency within history, but rather a relational dialectic between God and human beings.

> The climax of the crucifixion and resurrection ... becomes not merely the culmination of the whole series of revelations but the pattern of all subsequent confrontations between God and man. They must contain the crucifixion of self-abandonment and the resurrection of self-recovery. Men must die to sin with Christ and arise with him to newness of life.[142]

As has been illustrated above, the primary criticism of Liberation christology from the Niebuhrian perspective is its interpretation of the resurrection as an event which reveals a divine intimacy with history which leads to an optimism concerning the possibilities of the historical process. Having recognized this tendency within Liberation theology, it must be asked of Niebuhrian christology whether its

dialectic of transcendence does not represent the opposite extreme. This will be a primary question as we examine the continuing presence of the 'historical Jesus'.

"Historical Jesus": continuing presence of Jesus

Liberation theologians understand that the resurrected Jesus continues to be present in history as a spiritual force. In this regard Jesus is the 'Christ of faith' with whom communion is experienced in worship and prayer. But Liberation theologians are wary of an understanding of the spiritual presence of Christ which can be reduced to the subjective and personal religious experience of worship. Sobrino makes it clear that access to the Christ of faith is only by means of the 'historical Jesus'.[143] In this manner Liberation theologians maintain that the continued spiritual presence of Jesus the Christ also includes historical dimensions. It is these various historical dimensions of the spiritual presence of the 'historical Jesus' that we will now examine.

An initial understanding of Jesus' spiritual presence is through the memory of his history. Sobrino and Boff understand that the memory of the history of Jesus creates a critical consciousness which serves to summon human beings to re-create his history in current history. As Sobrino states;

> So long as domination and protest have not been overcome completely, so long as sinfulness and conflict perdure in history, Jesus will ever remain present as a 'dangerous' memory and a point of crisis. He will remain to call our own path into question on the basis of his own historical path. But the innermost core of his history will be turned into reality only insofar as his followers re-create his path rather than merely retrace it. In this way the history of Jesus as history will serve as spirit, standing in need of flesh to concretize itself.[144]

Niebuhr has a similar understanding of the function of the history of Jesus. He differs from Boff and Sobrino in that he is more aware of the problems surrounding any simple identification of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection as history. Niebuhr prefers to identify the history of Jesus in a symbolic rather than literal manner. Thus,

Niebuhr refers to Jesus' history as story, epic, and drama.[144] This does not change the fundamental role of Jesus' history as that which creates a crisis in the human's self-understanding in relation to God and history. Where Niebuhr differs from Liberation theology is concerning the content of the revelation in the story of Jesus. Niebuhr emphasizes the revelation of God's sovereignty as judgement and mercy which calls into question all human attempts to complete history and promises divine completion at the end of history. Niebuhr emphasizes the transcendent dimension in the drama of Jesus' life. This transcendent dimension finds ultimate realization in the impossible possibility of Jesus' self-sacrificial love.

This difference that Niebuhrian theology has with Liberation theology does not necessarily exclude the historical relationship which Boff and Sobrino are concerned to maintain concerning the history of Jesus and current historical practice. Understanding the history of Jesus as story, drama, or epic, does not mean that it must be void of historical dimensions such as the socio-political relationships which Liberation theologians are concerned to identify. In this manner, the more sophisticated understanding of Jesus' history as story, drama, and epic, can be the revelatory medium for both Niebuhr's concern for transcendent self-giving love and Liberation theology's concern for historical practice. What is lost to Liberation theology is the ability to appeal to the authority of the historicity of Jesus' life. But from the perspective of Niebuhrian theology this is not a loss since the historicity of the life of Jesus is beyond exegetical verification. For Niebuhrian theology, the authority of the story, drama, or epic, is in its function as the revelation of historical meaning and as a medium of divine confrontation and forgiveness. Or from the Liberation perspective, its authority is in its function as revelation of human-divine praxis in history which summons human beings to re-create that praxis.

This brings us to consider the second way in which the 'historical Jesus' continues to be present. This second way of spiritual presence is the continuing historical praxis of Jesus embodied in contemporary human praxis. Sobrino understands that communion with the risen Christ occurs in this continuation of praxis.

> Contact with Jesus is rendered possible only when our attitude is one of service to the kingdom of God. To put it in straightforward but pointed terms, we can say that Jesus' intrinsic relationship to the kingdom means that our contact with him will not come primarily through cultic acclamation or adoration but through following Jesus in the service of God's kingdom.[146]

Boff and Gutiérrez both agree with Sobrino that Jesus continues to be present in history through human beings who engage in the following of Jesus.[147] By means of this 'following' or discipleship, the history of Jesus is re-created. This discipleship is described by Sobrino as follows.

> We can now describe the nature of this following or discipleship. First, it is a praxis, a line of action similar to that of Jesus himself. The following of Jesus is a summons to collaborate with the kingdom of God. Second, this action is structurally akin to that of Jesus, and here we have an unvarying constant in Christian praxis. It is directed toward the public sector, toward the concrete manifestations of politics, bodily life, and the cosmos. Third, its applications will vary with time and place. New forms of sin, misery, and alienation will keep cropping up in history, and they will call for new ways of overcoming them in practice. Fourth, the following of Jesus is a praxis in which one experiences the same sort of structural conflicts that Jesus did. One encounters the power of evil over truth and love on the political and religious level, and even on the level of God himself. One confronts God's silence and relative historical impotence in the face of evil. It is this that gives rise to a hope against hope. Fifth, the one outstanding difference between the follower and Jesus is that Jesus suffered and died in solitude whereas his followers suffer and die in communion with him.[148]

Liberation theologians make it clear that this discipleship is not to be understood as an imitation of the history of Jesus. The history of Jesus reveals motives and attitudes which Jesus actualizes within a specific socio-political and religious context. For the Liberation theologian, re-creating the history of Jesus does not mean making the same socio-political decisions which Jesus made. But rather it means re-creating his same motives and attitudes within a different socio-political and religious environment. This will involve different decisions and the adoption of a course of action which may differ greatly from those of the 'historical Jesus'. Sobrino and Boff

recognize that one of the major differences between the 'historical Jesus' and the contemporary realization of Jesus' praxis in discipleship concerns the expectation of the imminent arrival of God's Kingdom. As Sobrino states;

> The long delay in the arrival of the parousia puts the Christian in a situation that is fundamentally different from that of Jesus himself. The difference is not fundamentally theological, because God ever lies in the future both for Jesus and the Christian. The difference lies in the fact that Christians must look for a hermeneutics that will take due account of the way in which their situation differs from that of Jesus. It must explain the following of Jesus in the context of a history that does not seem to be near its end as yet, and that therefore will require all sorts of analyses if we are to organize history on our way toward the kingdom of God. We must now engage in religious, social, economic, and political analyses. Thus the following of Jesus must take due account of Jesus' own basic attitudes and motives, but it cannot come down to any mere 'imitation' of Jesus.[149]

Leonardo Boff understands that this re-creation of Jesus' historical praxis finds its highest level of historical concretion in the Church. It is the Church which specifically has the task of carrying forward the message and mission of Jesus in novel historical contexts.

> ... God realized his kingdom only in his Envoy. Consequently a path was opened up for a church with the same mission and message as Christ: little by little to announce and bring about the kingdom of God among human beings. The goodnews ought to be announced, not only to the Jews but to all, that the final destiny of humankind and all reality is good and this destiny is corporal and eternal life. The church carries the cause of Christ forward in the world, at the same time giving witness to and realizing it under the veils of faith, love, hope, and mystery.[150]

In this manner the Church realizes its historical role as the community of faith and the body of Christ.

Niebuhr is in agreement with Liberation theology that the history of Jesus contains normative aspects in relation to contemporary life. Where he differs is concerning the content of Jesus as norm. Niebuhr understands that Jesus is the 'second Adam' in which is revealed the 'essential' human. In this way Jesus is the norm of human nature in its ultimate expression as self-giving love.

> Christ as the norm of human nature defines the final perfection of man in history. This perfection is not so much a sum total of various virtues or an absence of transgression of various laws; it is the perfection of sacrificial love.'[151]

For Niebuhr this norm is not a possibility within history. Jesus as norm of sacrifical love is a norm which is over history and which reveals both the perennial corruption of love and also the ultimate fulfilment of love in God. Niebuhr uses the biblical symbols of 'first' and 'second' Adam to indicate this dialectical tension in history between the distorted achievements of human existence and the norm of human existence in Jesus.

> The whole character of human history is ... implicitly defined in the Christian symbolism of the 'first' and 'second' Adam. To define the norm of history provisionally in terms of prehistoric innocency is to recognize that a part of the norm of man's historic existence lies in the harmonious relation of life to life in nature. To define it ultimately in terms of a sacrifical love which transcends history is to recognize the freedom of man over his own history without which historical creativity would be impossible. The actual historic achievements of man in history, his creation of larger and larger units of 'brotherhood', the building of city-states, nations and empires, are always corrupted by the twin evils of the tyrannical subordination of life to life and the anarchic conflict of life with life. There is therefore no pure ethical norm in history; nor any hope of history gradually purifying itself so that it will achieve this norm. The 'essential', the normative man, is thus a 'God-man' whose sacrificial love seeks conformity with, and finds justification in, the divine and eternal *agape*, the ultimate and final harmony of life with life.'[152]

This normative role of Jesus over history is to be understood as trans-historical rather than ahistorical. While Niebuhr emphasizes the transcendent nature of this norm, it is none-the-less the medium for the empowerment of human agency in history. This norm mediates divine judgement and mercy which requires the corresponding human response of contrition and faith. In judgement and contrition human beings come into awareness of their attempts to complete their own lives. In mercy and faith they embrace divine power which completes their incompleteness. This completeness is not to be understood as realized in historical existence. It is the power of forgiveness which provides

newness of life through faith and hope. It is this forgiveness and mercy which is continually providing the human being with new possibilities and potential in spite of his or her constant subjection to finite limitations and impulses to self-regard. Niebuhr identifies this power as grace or 'Holy Spirit' which provides human life with resources which human beings do not have of themselves. In this manner Jesus as norm is both the indicator of limitation in historical endeavour and also the source of power for achievement in history.[153]

> To understand that the Christ in us is not a possession but a hope, that perfection is not a reality but an intention; that such peace as we know in this life in never purely the peace of achievement but the serenity of being 'completely known and all forgiven',; all this does not destroy moral ardour or responsibility. On the contrary it is the only way of preventing premature completions of life, or arresting the new and more terrible pride which may find its roots in the soil of humility, and of saving the Christian life from the intolerable pretensions of saints who have forgotten that they are sinners.[154]

In the same manner Niebuhrian theology is in qualified agreement with Boff that the Church is the continuing body of Christ. Once again Niebuhr differs in emphasis in relation to Liberation theology. For Niebuhrian theology the Church is the continuing focus of divine judgement and mercy. The Church continues to be conscious of its own limitations and failures as individuals and as a group, and of its continuing need of divine forgiveness. At the same time Niebuhr also recognizes that the Holy Spirit is a power in the life of the Church and that the Church will achieve relative embodiments of Christ's praxis.

> ... the Church is the body of Christ and ... the noble living and the noble dead in her communion help to build up in her the living Christ, a dimension of life which transcends the inclinations of natural man. It is consequently natural and inevitable that the faithful should regard genuine acts of love as proceeding from propulsions which are not their own, and should confess with St. Paul, 'I, yet not I, but Christ that dwelleth in me.'[155]

A third understanding of the continuing presence of Jesus is that of universal spiritual immanence in all human beings. This position of universal immanence is held by Boff and Gutiérrez.[156] Boff understands

that Jesus is hidden, 'incognito', behind each human face. He understands that Jesus, "... as glorified and present in each person, is acting and fermenting the goodness, humanity, brotherhood, communion, and love in all human beings".[157]

This issue of universal immanence has been addressed in earlier chapters.[158] Niebuhrian theology stands in stark contrast to this position. Niebuhr understands that this position of universal immanence leads to an optimism toward human history and existence which is unwarranted.

> ... the idea of the immanent Christ in man, just as a completely immanent *logos* in history, obscures the real dialectic between the historical and the eternal. It fails to recognize that the freedom of man in history, whether conceived in rational or mystical terms contains possibilities of both good and evil.[159]

In the same manner Niebuhrian theology disagrees with Boff and Gutiérrez that Jesus is the revelation of general divine spiritual presence. Niebuhr maintains that Christ is the revelation of the holiness of divine spirit which is both transcendent and relevant to human life. Niebuhr maintains a dialectical position in contrast to universal immanentism.

> According to the Christian faith, Christ is the criterion of the holiness of spirit. He is the criterion of holiness because the revelation of God in Christ is on the one hand an historical focus of the divine, through which the mystery of the divine becomes morally and socially relevant to human nature, involved in finiteness and unable to comprehend the eternal. On the other hand it is the unique character of the revelation of God in Christ that it makes the divine and eternal known in history without giving any particular or partial force, value or vitality of history a sanctity or triumph which its finite and imperfect character does not deserve. Christ is thus both the criterion of the holiness of spirit and the symbol of the relevance between the divine and the human.[160]

A fourth and final way in which Liberation theology understands Jesus to have a continuing presence is related to the presence of the poor and oppressed. This christological significance of the poor and oppressed is not a recent assertion in Latin American theology. Gutiérrez likes to draw awareness to Fr. Bartolome de Las Casas of four

centuries past, who during the conquest, referred to the oppressed amerindians as the 'beaten Christs of the Indies'.[161] Liberation theologians understand the christological significance of the poor and oppressed in different ways. Boff and Gutiérrez tie the significance of the poor and oppressed to their understanding of divine immanence. This allows them to find a literal presence of Christ in the poor whereby a relationship with the poor is identical with a relationship with Christ. Boff understands this presence to be sacramental in nature.

> Historically, the eternal Son, in whom we are God's offspring (Eph. 2:10), became incarnate as the suffering Servant. Hence all the sufferers of history are special sacraments of Jesus Christ, the suffering Servant. In them we find a deeper and more concentrated presence of Christ.'[162]

As stated above, Niebuhrian theology rejects this sacramental position in favour of a dialectical relationship between the divine and history, or groups within history. It resists identifying any group with a 'deeper and more concentrated presence of Christ'.

This rejection of an immanent christological significance in the poor and oppressed does not exhaust the christological significance of the poor and oppressed. Other Liberation theologians explore this issue in a manner concerning which Niebuhrian theology has little response. Sobrino and Vidales understand that the oppression which Jesus suffered is continually re-enacted in contemporary oppression.[163] In this way the Cross is a continual historical reality and all oppression carries with it christological significance. Sobrino understands that the Cross of Jesus and the divine sorrow associated with it continues in current oppression. Thus, God continues in solidarity and sorrow with the 'crucified' of history. It is this divine solidarity and sorrow concerning the poor and oppressed which provide a focus for the discipleship described above. It is in this way that the poor and oppressed become a mediation of spiritual encounter with Christ. Sobrino understands that the presence of the poor and oppressed mediate a crisis wherein conversion and discipleship can take place.

> The systematic importance of this point for any historical theology of liberation lies in the fact that the privileged mediation of God ever continues to be the real cross of the oppressed, not nature or history as a totality. It is there that we find something totally other than a 'natural' conception of God. Oppressed persons are the mediation of God because, first of all, they break down the normal self-interest with which human beings approach other human beings. Merely by being there, the oppressed call into question those who approach, challenging their 'being human'; and this radical questioning of what it means to be a human being serves as the historical mediation of our questioning of what 'being God' means. That is why those who do approach the oppressed get the real feeling that it is they who are being evangelized and converted rather than those to whom they seek to render service.[164]

This understanding of the poor and oppressed as a mediation of divine encounter is a general understanding of christological significance. Boff understands that this significance becomes more specific in those who find that discipleship leads to oppression and death like that of Jesus.

> Today the passion of the mystical Christ, embodied in the lives of those who are sacrificed for the cause of justice, preserves the same structure as the passion of the historical Jesus. Like Jesus, many people today are being persecuted and killed for defending the rights of the lowly and the just claims of the poor. They suffer this fate out of fidelity to God, who asks them to sacrifice their lives for those causes. Those causes are greater than life itself, because they are the causes of God and God's kingdom.[165]

This continuing of the 'historical Jesus' through the 'crucifixion' of the oppressed and the poor has no parallel in Niebuhrian theology. This is not to say that Niebuhr has no understanding concerning the theological significance of other human beings. He does understand that there is a sense of common solidarity as we exist under the judgement and mercy of God.

> Gratitude for what life is in its essence creates a propulsive power to affirm in existence what is truly essential, the harmony of life with life. Furthermore, under the insights of such a faith, the fellow man becomes something more than the creature of time and place, separated from us by the contingencies of nature and geography and set against us by the necessities of animal existence. His life is seen under the aura of the divine and he participates in the glory, dignity and beauty of existence. We do

> not love him because he is 'divine'. If that pantheistic note creeps into prophetic faith it leads to disillusion. He is no more divine than we are. We are all imbedded in the contingent and arbitrary life of animal existence and we have corrupted the harmless imperfections of nature with the corruptions of sin. Yet we are truly 'children of God' and something of the transcendent unity, in which we are one in God, shines through both the evil of nature and the evil in man. Our heart goes out to our fellow man, when seen through the eyes of faith, not only because we see him thus under a transcendent perspective but because we see ourselves under it and know that we are sinners just as he is.'[166]

The specific identification of the poor and oppressed as mediators of christological significance is a challenge to Niebuhrian theology. Liberation theology perceives a continuity of the historical experience of the Cross which gives contemporary 'crucifixion' corresponding theological importance. Where Niebuhrian christology leaves judgement and mercy at the Cross of Jesus, Liberation christology perceives continuing divine judgement and call to discipleship in the 'crosses' of history. This is not to say that Liberation theology seeks to deny the transcendent dimension of divine mercy and judgement found in Niebuhrian theology. But it is equally concerned that divine encounter have a location in history in continuity with the 'historical Jesus'.

This brings to a conclusion our examination of the 'historical Jesus' of Liberation theology. It is now appropriate to identify the primary christological affirmation which guides Liberation theology and which is founded in the above 'historical Jesus'.

Theological affirmations

In our examination of Liberation christology we have not dealt directly with the classical christological formulations of historical doctrine. This is not because Liberation theology does not address such issues as incarnation, two natures of Christ, or the Trinity. These classical christological formulations have not been addressed in this study because of limitations of length and more importantly because the classical christological formulations are not the central concern of Liberation christology. The different Liberation theologians integrate the classical doctrines into their reflections in

various ways. But these theologians are concerned to emphasize the significance of Jesus in a way which may or may not be in continuity with the affirmations of classical christology. It is beyond the scope of this study to assess their varied adaptation and re-interpretation of the classical formulations. What is central to this study and to the issue of justice is the primary affirmation of Liberation christology that Jesus Christ is to be understood as Liberator.

The title of Leonardo Boff's book, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, expresses this central christological affirmation of Liberation theology. This title indicates that the human, historical, Jesus has universal significance as the Christ. And that this understanding of 'Christ' is one which has to do with ongoing liberation which is historical and socio-political rather than exclusively eschatological and trans-historical. In this manner Jesus is understood as the 'way', and 'firstborn', providing a model for human-divine collaboration in the historical process of realizing relative concretions of the Kingdom of God. Boff and Sobrino are in agreement that the primary task of christology is the identification and re-creation of the liberating praxis found in Jesus. As Sobrino states; "... the most urgent task of Christology is to reposition the path and course of believers so that their lives can be a continuing, advancing discipleship, a following of Jesus, and hence a process of concrete filiation as his life was".[167]

This theological affirmation of Jesus Christ Liberator stands in contrast to Niebuhrian christology. Niebuhrian christology presents Jesus as Christ Crucified who is the 'second Adam'. As Christ Crucified, Jesus is understood as the revelation of divine love which through judgement and mercy takes the consequence of human sin into himself. At the same time Jesus is the revelation of the 'second Adam' which indicates the ultimate completion of human life in God. In both these affirmations the Niebuhrian concern is with the transcendent and trans-historical dimension of the theological significance of Jesus.

This contrast between Liberation christology and Niebuhrian christology is not necessarily one of mutual exclusion. Both these positions could be seen as emphasizing different dimensions of a complete christology. Niebuhrian christology can be seen to qualify the optimism of Liberation theology concerning the achievements of

history, the epistemological accessibility of the divine in history, and the moral agency of human beings. Niebuhrian christology also recognizes the exegetical inaccessibility to the 'historical Jesus' and develops a more sophisticated approach to the 'historical Jesus' through the concepts of 'story, drama, and epic'. In a similar manner Liberation christology prevents Niebuhrian christology from realizing a tendency toward an abstract symbolic christology which is in danger of being ahistorical. Liberation christology forces on Niebuhrian christology the 'historical' dimension of the Jesus narrative. It forces Niebuhrian christology to recognize the socio-political dimension of the 'historical Jesus'. This socio-political dimension finds concretion in the divine solidarity with the poor and oppressed who carry in their 'crucifixion' christological significance. In this way Liberation christology establishes a historical dimension which is lacking in Niebuhrian christology. This mutual modification allows a complete christology to maintain both historical and trans-historical dimensions which are inclusive of the theological affirmations of both Christ Crucified and Jesus Christ Liberator.

The significance of christology for a theology of justice

Liberation and Niebuhrian christologies provide us with the theological grounding for a theology of justice. Niebuhrian christology provides the trans-historical reference points of divine *agape* and the Kingdom of God. These transcendent norms, or 'impossible possibilities', illuminate the task of justice concerning its limitations and possibilities. This theological foundation in christology becomes the source for toleration, humility, and forgiveness in the realization of justice in history.

In like manner, Liberation christology provides historical reference points for orienting the task of justice. One of these orienting points is the 'historical Jesus' which serves as a source for the creation of a strategy of discipleship. This discipleship, or 'following' of Jesus, is a creative model for pursuing justice within the conflicts of a particular socio-political context. Most importantly, in relation to this discipleship, Liberation christology

provides the poor and oppressed as a reference point for assessing justice and creating strategies of justice.

These themes of Liberation and Niebuhrian christology provide the task of justice with theological breadth which is inclusive of a transcendent horizon of reference as well as a theological reference within the conflicts of socio-political life. It provides the task of justice with the divine norm of *agape* as well as the concretion of love identified with the poor and oppressed. These theological themes set the limits to optimism concerning future achievement of justice in history and also prevents complacency concerning the degree of justice which has currently been achieved.

NOTES

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24. Boff, op. cit., page 176.
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27. Sobrino, op. cit., page 35.
28. Boff, op. cit., pages 231 and 232.
29. Ibid., page 266.
30. Assmann, op. cit., page 139.
31. Boff, op. cit., pages 89 and 90.
32. Ibid., pages 90 and 96.
33. Sobrino, op. cit., pages 99, 100, and 101.
34. Ibid., page 300; see also Segundo, op. cit., page 49; Boff, op. cit., page 116; Ellacuria, op. cit., page 82.
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75. Croatto, op. cit., page 120.
76. Ellacuría, op. cit., page 85; see also Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, page 283; Croatto, op. cit., page 116; Gutiérrez, op. cit., pages 228 and 229.
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140. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: Human Destiny*, Vol. II, op. cit., pages 305 and 307.
141. Niebuhr, *Faith and History*, op. cit., page 170.
142. Ibid., page 168.
143. Sobrino, op. cit., pages 274 and 275.
144. Ibid., pages 138 and 139. See also Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, op. cit., page 245.
145. Niebuhr, *Faith and History*, op. cit., pages 159 - 161.
146. Sobrino, op. cit., page 50.
147. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1983, page 96; Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, op. cit., page 220.
148. Sobrino, op. cit., page 256.
149. Ibid., page 306. See also Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, op. cit., page 286.
150. Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, op. cit., pages 133, 221, and 222.
151. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: Human Destiny*, Vol. II, op. cit., pages 71 and 80.
152. Ibid., page 84.
153. Ibid., pages 56 - 60, 63, 64, 66, 102, and 103.
154. Ibid., page 130.
155. Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, op. cit., page 216.
156. Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, op. cit., pages 206, 207, 218, and 219; Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, op. cit., pages 192 and 193.
157. Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, op. cit., page 218.
158. See above pages 143 - 146.
159. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: Human Destiny*, Vol. II, op. cit., page 182.
160. Ibid., page 116.
161. Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Freedom and Salvation: A Political Problem", in *Liberation and Change*, Gustavo Gutiérrez and Richard Schaull; Ronald H. Stone ed., Atlanta, John Knox Press, 1977, page 92.
162. Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Salvation and Liberation*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1984, page 63.
163. Sobrino, op. cit., page 201; Vidales, op. cit., pages 140 and 141.
164. Sobrino, op. cit., pages 222 and 223.
165. Leonardo Boff, *Way of the Cross - Way of Justice*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1982, page ix.
166. Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, op. cit., pages 219 and 220.
167. Sobrino, op. cit., page 342; Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, op. cit., page 292 and 293.

9. LIBERATION VALUES AND ETHICAL PRAXIS

In previous chapters we have examined the theological method and primary themes of Liberation theology. In this chapter we will examine the values which compel liberation praxis. The values which are at the heart of Liberation praxis are love and the Kingdom of God. These two values are intimately related and are fundamentally one reality. Both are are two ways of expressing the one reality of divine-human relationship. The identification of this reality in two values helps in the examination of different dimensions of the one reality. Love has to do with relational inclusiveness and self-giving while the Kingdom of God has to do with the future and the promise of completion of all present partial achievements. But this distinction between love and the Kingdom of God must be seen as somewhat artificial. For love is the law of the Kingdom and the Kingdom is the consummation and perfection of relationships.

Love as as a value of liberating praxis

Liberation theologians understand that God's love is gratuitous and universal. It is gratuitous in that it is a free and unmerited love for human beings. As Gustavo Gutiérrez states; "God's love, like all true love, operates in a world not of cause and effect but of freedom and gratuitiousness".[1] It is for this reason that Liberation theologians also understand this gratuitous love to be universal. This universal and gratuitous love makes all human beings brothers and sisters under one divine parent.

Jon Sobrino understands that this gratuitous love is dialectical in relation to human existence. While it is a free and unmerited love of human beings, it is not acceptance of the oppressive inequalities of human social life.

> From the viewpoint of content, the Christian God is love but, once again, love in a specific sense. This love contains a 'Yes' and a 'No' to the real world. Logical priority belongs to the definitive 'Yes' that God says to the world. But this 'Yes' requires that we first hear a 'No' that God says to oppression.[2]

It is for this reason that Liberation theologians understand that God's gratuitous and universal love is expressed by partiality to specific human beings. Sobrino identifies these specific human beings as those who are in need.[3] In the context of Latin America it is the poor and oppressed who are the receiptient of this preferential love. Victorio Araya is representative of this understanding of divine preferential love for the poor as the concretion of God's universal and gratuitous love.

> The partiality of God's love for the poor shows us the *gratuity* of that love -- the gratuity of a love *addressed to the poor because they are poor*, because they suffer injustice and death, and not because they may be 'spiritually poor' or morally good. That is, God loves the poor regardless of their moral and personal dispositions ...[4]

This partiality does not deny the universal nature of God's love, but as Araya states; "The universality of God's love passes by way of its partiality toward the poor ...".[5]

It is in the context of this gratuitous and preferential love that Gutiérrez perceives divine justice. God's justice is characterized by solidarity with the poor and a willingness by God to suffer with and for the poor. This is a justice which can not be confined to a narrow conception of merit. It is an expression of God's freedom and goodness. Gutiérrez refers to the gospel parable of the prodigal son as an example of this divine parental love which transcends any formalities of human justice.[6]

This gratuitous love of God is the format for the praxis of human love. In divine love human life finds its meaning and possibilities. Within this context, human love is a response to divine love. This human love seeks to achieve correspondence to God's gratuitous love in human relationships. Liberation theologians understand that this love has limitless possibilities in human life. As Leonardo Boff states; "There are no limits to the human capacity for loving".[7] This is not

to be understood as the ability to achieve the perfection of divine gratuitous love. As Segundo Galilea states; "Our love is a caricature (Rom. 12:9). Our selfishness, our worries, and our sensitivity hold us back".[8] Galilea is representative of the awareness that perfect love is an eschatological reality and not one definitively achieved in this world. But this does not deny the possibility of living out gratuitous love. For Sobrino this is the ultimate possibility of human life.

> The ultimate possibility open to human beings is that they should live the very life of God or, in other words, do within history that which finds expression in the essential reality of God, namely, love in a way that re-creates, saves, and gives life.[9]

In regard to the universality of God's love this means that our love is to also be universal. Sobrino states that we are to love human beings because God first loved them.[10] Gutiérrez makes the point that this love for human beings is not merely the result of God's prior love but must also be love of the human being for his or her own sake.[11] Gutiérrez and Boff base this love for the human being on an understanding of divine immanence. As Boff states;

> Perfect love is a love that loves everyone and everything because it discovers the lovableness of all as the concrete presence of God's own love. Every created reality is a locale for the encounter with God that shines through the depths of every being.[12]

For Gutiérrez this universal love means that we make all human beings our brothers and sisters and that communion and brotherhood is the ultimate meaning of human life.[13] It is within this universal context that Gutiérrez understands the command to love ones' neighbour. Love of neighbour does not have to do with limitations of proximity. As Gutiérrez states; "The neighbour ... is not he whom I find in my path, but rather he in whose path I place myself, he whom I approach and actively seek".[14]

Within the context of this divine filial and gratuitous love, Liberation theologians maintain that human love is to be fraternal and gratuitous. This means that love can not be simply individual or subjective. Ismael García is representative of the perception in

Liberation theology that gratuitous love entails the creation of social mutuality and community.

> Love calls for and demands the reunion of all people as a way to enable and sustain their mutual self-realization, freedom, and well-being. The quest for the reunion of humanity is an integral part of the Christian faith because it is a faith centred around the passion of love. It is a faith with a strong sense of the need for community for the realization of persons.[15]

Araya understands that this entails political dimensions in the practice of love which seeks the common good. Within this gratuitous and fraternal love he recognizes that; "The Christian is called to live in the gladness of a self-surrender that takes responsibility for making a better and more human world".[16]

This commitment to community and unity in history means that gratuitous love is to be expressed in a preferential manner in a present historical context of social alienation. Corresponding to the preferential nature of divine love, human gratuitous love will realize its historical concreteness in relation to particular human individuals and groups. Sobrino understands that the context of oppression and impoverishment creates an urgency in the expression of love. In this context it is concrete needs of the poor which determine the particularity of a universal love.

> The poor give love its urgency. Love is not just a commandment; it is not even the greatest of the commandments simply because Christ said so. If love were only a commandment it would retain an element of arbitrariness. Love is rather a conformity to the demands of reality, a conformity that is marked by urgency.[17]

Thus, in the context of Latin America, Gutiérrez maintains that the 'neighbour' whom we seek out will be the neighbour who is oppressed and poor.[18]

This fraternal and gratuitous love which functions to transform society in solidarity with the poor and oppressed has specific dimensions. Sobrino describes these functional dimensions in terms of two phases of love. The first phase has to do with effective action and the second with accepted suffering.[19] Liberation theologians are

in agreement that gratuitous love requires political commitment if it is to be efficacious. Araya is representative of this position.

> Love for the oppressed calls for expertise in political thinking, which will enable it, dialectically and without compromising its evangelical gratuity, to become effective in terms of both the reign of God and a political commitment.[20]

Liberation theologians understand that this effective love is characterized by conflict. They reject an understanding of love which is exclusively characterized as tolerance, compromise, or acceptance. For love to be effective, it must also be seen as a source for the generation of conflict leading to social transformation. Hugo Assmann exemplifies this position.

> Love tends toward reconciliation, dialogue, unity: this is basic to the Christian viewpoint. But can 'love' be the ideology of peace at any price? Has this in fact been the Christian position in practice? In many ways it would seem that it has. Many Christians are simply incapable of accepting conflict as a fact, and as for deepening existing contradictions so as to bring out their real nature, this would be unthinkable for most. Yet the Bible is full of this: conversion, whether individual or societal, implies assumption of conflict. We need to get rid of falsely conciliatory disfigurements of Christian thought and behaviour, and to release the rebel, negative and conflictive energies of love so as to see it in action as conflict in history; to design models of Christian love that are also models of liberating struggle.[21]

Sobrino perceives that universal gratuitous love achieves particularity within a social setting by taking sides. He understands that we take sides with the oppressed against the oppressor for the sake of all of them.[22] Gutiérrez is also representative of this understanding of love as creative conflict which seeks to liberate both the oppressed and the oppressor.

> The universality of Christian love is only an abstraction unless it becomes concrete history, process, conflict; it is arrived at only through particularity. To love all men does not mean avoiding confrontations; it does not mean preserving a fictitious harmony. Universal love is that which in solidarity with the oppressed seeks also to liberate the oppressors from their own power, from their ambition, and from their selfishness...[23]

This gratuitous love which enters into the conflicts of social inequality takes the form of liberative struggle for economic and political justice. As Araya states; "Justice is a primordial, irreducible form of love, for it takes account of the historical reality of humankind and the social dimension of the human person".[24] In the context of oppression and poverty, justice is the appropriate expression of love. And as García states; "To love today demands that we become engaged in transforming praxis seeking to create a more just social order".[25] This is not to say that love and justice are to be simply equated. Divine universal love makes relative all historical projects of liberation and prevents them from making absolute any particular project. In the same manner, the larger context of divine love stimulates justice to greater and greater achievements of mutuality. It is also because of this context of divine gratuitous love that human love can achieve expressions of gratuitousness which can not be simply reduced to formulas of justice. Gutiérrez is representative of this understanding of the gratuitous love of God as the context for creation of justice.

> ... emphasis on the practice of justice and on solidarity with the poor must never become an obsession and prevent our seeing that this commitment reveals its value and ultimate meaning only within the vast and mysterious horizon of God's gratuitous love. Furthermore, the very building of a just society requires a stimulus and an enveloping atmosphere that gratuitousness alone can supply. The point here is not to assign greater importance to the element of play and gratuitousness than to justice but to ensure that the world of justice finds its full meaning and source in the freely given love of God.[26]

While love can not be reduced to justice, justice within its structural expressions is still to be perceived as a form of love which helps to extend mutuality in social life. As Sobrino states; "Love that takes the form of justice extends the horizon of shared interests and of solidarity with other human beings. Love becomes more universal, though it may thereby lose something in intensity.".[27] Sobrino and García maintain that there is not a qualitative difference between love and justice. But rather a difference of intensity. As García states;

> The practice of love takes place within different realms of human existence. In all of them it expresses itself as a concern for the other so that she or he too can achieve the fullness of life. Love takes place within the family, within marriage, and within friendship. Historically and politically speaking, love expresses itself as the attempt to provide fullness of life and the experience of community to the majority of the poor and oppressed who have been kept marginal. Political love does not exhaust the fullness of love, but without it we lose a significant dimension of love that makes all other manifestations of it an incomplete experience. ...
> If there is a distinction between love and justice, then it is not a qualitative one but rather one of intensity.[28]

Juan Luis Segundo takes a very different approach to the issue of the effectiveness of love. He asserts that love is limited to immediate effectiveness within intimate relationships. Within what he calls an 'economy of energy' the energy of love is limited and can not extend to humanity in general. Segundo recognizes that relationships beyond intimate relations must be governed by law and coercion. This does 'violence' to the individual depth of human personality by reducing people to roles and functions within society. In this way universal love becomes effective through means that are associated with egoism and violence. Segundo understands that these means present continual possibilities for both oppression and liberation, but that law and coercion are the only means available to make love effective and prudent on the social level within the limits of an 'economy of energy'. Segundo differs from other Liberation theologians in that he maintains that the 'neighbour' is to be understood as the person near us and can not be generalized to apply to all humanity. He accepts that a form of structural violence is necessary to regulate relationships with all the 'others' who do not fit within our intimate circle of relations. While this structural violence is necessary due to the limits of human nature, it is in the service of effective love.[29]

> This basic structural violence is not opposed to love. It is an essential and intrinsic dimension of any and all effective love within the context of the human condition. The dynamic of love, however, tends in the direction of reducing the quantum of violence required for efficacy to the lowest possible level.[30]

As stated above, a phase of love which co-exists with efficacy is that of suffering. Sobrino perceives that this is a fundamental dimension of love that is gratuitous. The function of love in a situation of conflict in solidarity with the poor requires both efficacy and a willingness to suffer. When political or economic power is available then efficacy is a real possibility. But when love must be expressed within the context of imposed powerlessness, then gratuitous love necessarily becomes suffering love. This suffering love finds its most extreme expression in martyrdom. In regard to the urgency of the needs of the poor, Sobrino states;

> This urgency explains the two characteristic traits of Christian love: its effectiveness and its gratuitousness. Because the purpose is to save those whose who have no salvation, a loving intention is not enough nor are the means history shows to be limited and inadequate. The need is for an effective love that makes use of the practical and ideological means that will make justice a reality. And because the situation of the poor is desperate, love must be gratuitous, that is, more ready to give than to receive; it must not count the cost even if this be the surrender of life itself.[31]

Sobrino understands that love which is effective as justice must have this quality of self-sacrificial commitment or *kenosis* within the context of oppression. Love in solidarity with the oppressed implies a willingness to suffer in service of the poor.[32]

In similar manner this gratuitous love which is self-sacrificial and suffering is never without its concern for efficacy. Even the act of sacrifice of one's own life must take place within a concern for mutuality. García raises the concern that gratuitous love not be allowed to be taken advantage of by oppressors because of its nature as self-giving.

> This obligation of love-justice does not intend to make us victims of other's exploitation and domination. One cannot allow others to take advantage of our love and use it to reverse or perpetuate a relation of domination. Even acts of self-sacrifice must take into consideration the question of mutuality, an intrinsic dimension of justice.[33]

Niebuhrian theology is not in disagreement with the substance of Liberation theology in its analysis of love as a value of justice. It

agrees with Liberation theology that divine and human gratuitousness is relevant to every dimension of individual and social human life.[34] Where Niebuhrian theology disagrees with Liberation theology is concerning its lack of dialectical tension within its concept of love. Liberation theology successfully explicates the positive and creative relation between divine and human love and its determining influence on justice. It demonstrates the continuity of gratuitous love at all relational dimensions. But it does not sufficiently explore the negative and discontinuous elements of human reality.

A primary issue of dialectical tension is the difference between divine gratuitous love and human love. Niebuhrian theology maintains that any understanding of the continuity of divine and human love must also be balanced by an understanding of its fundamental discontinuity. Divine *agape* is an absolute norm to which human life can aspire but can not attain. This limitation on human love is illustrated by the paradox found in the biblical command to love. As Niebuhr states;

> To command love is a paradox; for love cannot be commanded or demanded. To love God with all our hearts and all our souls and all our minds means that every cleavage in human existence is overcome. But the fact that such an attitude is commanded proves that the cleavage is not overcome; the command comes from ones side of reality to the other, from essence to existence.[35]

Niebuhrian theology asserts that all human acts of gratuitousness are compounded with egoistic motives of self-regard and will-to-power. In other words, there is no moment in human agency which is free of sin. As Niebuhr states; "Love is the law of freedom; but man is not completely free; and such freedom as he has is corrupted by sin".[36]

Niebuhrian theology understands this to be a creative dialectic. This absolute norm of love limits the pretension and arrogance of human pride which desires to identify its relative achievements with absolute justification. In dialectical opposition to this limiting function of divine love is its ability to inspire greater achievements of gratuitous love in human life. This transcendent norm continually reveals the partial achievements of present expressions of love and indicates future possibilities of new and different expressions. As

Niebuhr understands; "The love commandment is ... always a challenge which stands vertically over every moral act and achievement."[37]

Niebuhrian theology agrees with Liberation theology that God's universal filial love is the basis for human universal fraternal love. It also agrees that this love is a force for greater community and unity.[38] But once again, Liberation theology is one-sided in its understanding of love in social life. It fails to take with equal seriousness the limitations of love and the forces for anarchy. Segundo is the exception to this criticism. His perception of the limitations of love within an 'economy of energy' corresponds to Niebuhrian insights concerning the limits of love. Niebuhrian theology understands that love is immediately applicable in intimate relationships but fails to have applicability in the complexity of larger social constructions. In larger social contexts love does not have the imagination to identify emotively with folk in indirect and complex social arrangements. In addition to the problem of limitation is that of distortion. The egoism of individuals and groups pursuing their own interests within the complex social structure is such that a simple application of love to social life is impossible.[39]

This brings us to the issue of effectiveness. Liberation theology and its lack of dialectical rigour results in an optimistic view of social life. It perceives love as a force for greater social unity and community. Within this understanding of love it presents justice as a form of love which helps to extend this unity and community. The dialectic it perceives in this process is the dialectic between fraternal love and its negation by oppression. In this context, Liberation theology maintains that conflict is a necessary dimension of love. Niebuhrian theology agrees with the realism of this understanding of conflict. Where it disagrees is in the limited application of this dialectic. Niebuhrian theology asserts that conflict is a constant in social life. Because individual and group egoism is a fundamental dimension of human life, there will always be conflict of interests within the social sphere.[40] It is for this reason that justice and love cannot be simply equated. Gratuitous love presumes self-giving without calculation of the cost to the self. Justice presumes a conflict of interests where egoism of individuals

and groups must be restrained and a relative harmony of relationships maintained. For this reason justice is to be understood as negative in function. From this perspective gratuitous love is seen to be an impossible value for the organization of social life.[41]

This position of Niebuhrian theology does not deny the relevance of gratuitous love to the establishment of justice. Divine *agape* is the horizon of all human social effort. It reveals the injustice in all relative achievements of justice and inspires greater mutuality in present constructions of justice. As Niebuhr states; "... the law of love is involved in all approximations of justice, not only as the source of the norms of justice, but as an ultimate perspective by which their limitations are discovered".[42] In this regard Niebuhrian theology recognizes that gratuitous love transcends the distortions and limitations of human social life and is not directly applicable as a social value. Niebuhrian theology recognizes that the greatest form of love achievable in social life is that of mutual love. This form of love is based on reciprocity and therefore has historical justification.[43] Within this context it is the social value of equality which is the logical approximation of love within an environment of egoistic self-regard and will-to-power. As Niebuhr states;

> Equality stands in a medial position between love and justice. If the obligation to love the neighbour as the self is to be reduced to rational calculation, the only guarantee of the fulfilment of the obligation is a grant to the neighbour which equals what the self claims for itself. Thus equality is love in terms of logic.[44]

This does not deny the fact that individuals and even intimate groups may act in conformity with gratuitous love and have positive influence on social justice. Niebuhrian theology understands that this gratuitous love is necessary to prevent the basic or rough justice of calculation of mutuality from degenerating into forms of injustice because of imperfect formulations of reciprocity. As Niebuhr states; "No system of justice established by the political, economic, and social coercion in the political order is perfect enough to dispense with the refinements which voluntary and uncoerced human kindness and

tenderness between individuals add to it".[45] It is in this context that Niebuhrian theology understands that gratuitous love will always be suffering love which mitigates the vindictiveness of social life with the value of forgiveness.[46]

This rigorous dialectic in Niebuhrian theology prevents the analysis of love as a value in social life from degenerating into a form of sentimentality which perceives love as directly applicable to the complexities of economic and political life. This optimism in the analysis of gratuitous love by Liberation theology calls into question its effectiveness within the continual conflictive nature of social existence. The positive contributions of gratuitous love to social life becomes tenuous if the balances of power inherent in social existence are not recognized and maintained. Niebuhr maintains that the establishment of justice needs both love and balance of power.

> A balance of power is something different from, and inferior to, the harmony of love. It is a basic condition of justice, given the sinfulness of man. Such a balance of power does not exclude love. In fact, without love the frictions and tensions of a balance of power would become intolerable. But without the balance of power even the most loving relations may degenerate into unjust relations, and love may become the screen which hides the injustice.[47]

What protects Liberation theology from the charge of sentimentality is the identification of divine and human love with the poor and oppressed. Even according to Niebuhrian analysis, gratuitous love as a force for justice is appropriate in the context of Latin America. The poor and oppressed of Latin America are not lost in the complexities and indirect relationships of social life. They are continually present as the majority of human beings in Latin American social existence living in extreme poverty. There is no barrier to the imagination whereby love can enter into their interests. In this context gratuitous love is a powerful emotive force for social change. Where Niebuhrian theology brings this force for justice under criticism is concerning its applicability to smaller groups in the social context. While love is immediately applicable to a majority in need, it is imaginatively limited in its resources to deal with the many

smaller groups in need whose interests may be different from the majority. A second criticism concerns the egoistic tendency of any group to give their relative values and interests ultimate justification. The poor and oppressed are no less subject to this danger than the oppressors.

Where Liberation theology confronts the Niebuhrian position is concerning its concreteness. Niebuhrian theology is rigorous in its dialectical understanding of social conflict. But it can be accused of being too general in its understanding of love as the horizon of social life which stimulates greater approximations and mitigates abuses. While Niebuhrian theology provides an absolute norm by which discriminating decisions are made concerning the degree to which a social system approximates justice, there is no specific historical locus from which this assessment is made. His formula for the assessment of justice remains general. As Niebuhr states; "The closest approximation to a love in which life supports life in voluntary community is a justice in which life is prevented from destroying life and the interests of the one are guarded against unjust claims by the other".[48] In contrast to Niebuhrian theology, Liberation theology provides the poor and oppressed as the perspective from which justice is assessed. In this regard Niebuhrian theology is not dialectical enough. It needs both the transcendent norm of divine love and the concrete needs of the poor as the basis for discriminating decisions concerning the effectiveness of a particular construction of social justice. It needs both a transcendent norm and a specific historical referent.

This brings us to the point where it is appropriate to examine the value of the Kingdom of God as a value of liberating praxis.

The Kingdom of God as a value of liberating praxis

The value of the Kingdom of God is the value of love understood in relation to time. The Kingdom of God is the promise of the fulfilment of love in relation to the processes of history. It is the promise of final unity and harmony at the horizon of human history and is the completion and realization of love in the future of human existence.

It is what Boff understands as total human and cosmic liberation.[49] Sobrino defines this Kingdom of God as follows;

> ... the kingdom of God is a reality in which the human world is in harmony with the will and being of God himself. It becomes a world in which human unity and the divine inheritance of all God's children are coextensive.[50]

Liberation theology perceives that this definitive and absolute Kingdom stands in dialectical relation to the present. The absolute value of the Kingdom is not to be understood as future in exclusion to the present. But neither is the Kingdom to be understood as a natural possibility of historical processes. Enrique Dussel and Victorio Araya exemplify this dialectical understanding of the Kingdom. Dussel states;

> To remove the present aspect of the Kingdom is to accept history simply as a 'vale of tears' without further meaning. To remove the future aspect of the Kingdom is to make a fetish of the present and so to fall into idolatry.[51]

In similar manner Araya states;

> The kingdom is not actualized on the margins of history. It is not the negation of history as a mere episode deprived of relationship with the kingdom (which would be religious 'reductionism'). But neither is the kingdom the natural denouement of history (which would be an over optimistic evolutionism). On the contrary, history issues in the kingdom (eschatological plenitude) through the medium of suffering, conflict, and judgement. The kingdom transforms and fulfils the 'corporality' of history and the dynamic of love and justice that have been been operative in history.[52]

Gutiérrez maintains that this dialectical relationship to the present functions in terms of annunciation and denunciation. The Kingdom of God is annunciation of the Father's love which reveals the absolute meaning and goal of human existence.[53] This absolute realization of love is both continuous and discontinuous with the present. It is discontinuous in that the final harmony and unity of the Kingdom is not subject to realization in human history by human agency. But at the same time it is continuous in that relative achievements of love in history find their motivation and meaning in

the eschatological Kingdom of love in the future. Gutiérrez asserts that the eschatological promise of love is both an absolute horizon and a relative actualization in human history.

> The eschatological promises are being fulfilled throughout history, but this does not mean that they can be identified clearly and completely with one or another social reality; their liberating effect goes far beyond the foreseeable and opens up new and unsuspected possibilities. The complete encounter with the Lord will mark an end to history, but it will take place in history. Thus we must acknowledge historical events in all their concreteness and significance, but we are also led to a permanent detachment. The encounter is present even now, dynamizing humanity's process of becoming and projecting it beyond man's hopes ...[54]

In this way the Kingdom of love which is promise and which stands at the horizon of human history is a powerful force orienting human action in direction of its future fulfilment.

Liberation theologians are concerned to emphasize that the absolute Kingdom is not merely an idea or model which provides a template for moral behaviour. Segundo is critical of the theology of Weth, Moltmann, and Metz precisely concerning this point. He rejects their description of the Kingdom as 'anticipation', 'analogy', and 'outline', in its relation to social activity.[55]

> ... who dedicates their life to an 'analogy'? Who dies for an 'outline'? Who motivates a human mass or a people in the name of an 'anticipation'? ...
> What about the relationship between a liberative event in history and the definitive kingdom of God? By virtue of the power of God who lies behind it every such happening, however ambiguous and provisional it may be, stands in a causal relationship to the definitive kingdom. The causality is partial, fragile, often distorted and in need of reworking; but it is a far cry from being nothing more than an anticipation, outline, or analogy of the kingdom.[56]

Míguez Bonino is concerned with this same point.

> ... any language which confines the relation between history and the Kingdom to the realm of image-reality remains inadequate. The Kingdom is not merely adumbrated, reflected, foreshadowed, or analogically hinted at in the individual and collective realizations of love in history, but actually present, operative, authentically -- however imperfectly and partially -- realized.[57]

Segundo and Míguez Bonino understand that the Kingdom of God has direct causality in human life. The realization of effective love through the achievement of relative justice and the extension of fraternity are realizations of the Kingdom of God. They are what Sobrino calls the 'Kingdom at hand'. As Sobrino states; "The kingdom of God is at hand when men and women actively seek that efficacious love that will transform this world according to the ideal of the kingdom to come".[58] These relative and approximate realizations of human community and mutuality are not the absolute Kingdom which is at the horizon of history. Yet they are the Kingdom of God in that they are motivated by God and realize concrete historical embodiments of love. In agreement with Segundo and Míguez Bonino, Sobrino perceives that the 'Kingdom at hand' is something which is lived out through the praxis of justice within an unconditional trust in the God of the future.[59]

In the same manner the absolute Kingdom of God is to be understood as denunciation in relation to the present. The definitive Kingdom of God is denunciation and judgement because it is finally a gift of God which human agency can participate in but can not achieve. The final absolute realization of the Kingdom is something which God alone can attain. In this manner the Kingdom is to be recognized as an eschatological reality which will transform and fulfil all the partial and limited achievements of human historical endeavour. From this eschatological horizon all human achievement is brought under judgement and their limitations revealed. As Míguez Bonino states; "God's judgement encompasses the totality of our human achievements".[60] This judgement prevents any historical project from claiming ultimacy.

There can be no sacralization of a human project from this absolute perspective. In this regard Gutiérrez recognizes that the growth of the Kingdom in human history and projects of social liberation are distinct and separate realities; "They have the same goal, but they do not follow parallel roads, not even convergent ones".[61] This function of denunciation has the result of motivating human agency to seek ever new and greater achievements of effective love in history. This denunciation opens up the future and releases

the creative imagination of human life. It is a perspective from which all current forms of community and mutuality are found wanting and new possibilities are suggested. As Sobrino states; "God's kingdom does not confirm the present reality of humankind and its history; rather, it passes judgement on that reality in order to re-create it".[62]

Liberation theologians maintain that this annunciation and denunciation is not to be limited to theological categories or to a general assessment of effective realizations of love. Annunciation and denunciation is mediated in history in the presence of the poor. Dussel is representative of this understanding of the role of the poor.

> There is an essential link between accepting the tension of the 'already' and the 'not yet' and the material reality of the poor. For as the oppressed, the product of injustice, the poor reveal in their very misery the necessity of the coming of that infinite fulfilment of all the insufficiences of history that is the kingdom. The reality of the poor makes us discover the reality of the kingdom's 'not yet'; at the same time it prevents any fetishization of the kingdom's 'already' and thus gives the kingdom the necessary dialectical flexibility for making both faith and hope still possible.[63]

Dussel understands that it is the poor who are the subject-carriers of the Kingdom and who concretize the annunciation and denunciation of social life. The presence of the poor reveal the 'not yet' of the Kingdom. They are the mediation of judgement and reveal the failure of social projects to approximate the absolute Kingdom. In this way the poor serve as an indicator of the degree to which social life corresponds to the values of the Kingdom.

> In their visible, material and undisguisable poverty the poor show clearly where the system cannot adequately distribute its goods, i.e. who are suffering from domination by others, and are evidence of the sin of the system. The poor are the sign, the bleeding wound, of the deep structural sickness of the system. *The presence of the poor is the measure of the absence of God's kingdom in a society.*[64]

Dussel also perceives that the poor are the historical mediation of the annunciation of future possibility. In a positive restatement of the above quote he understands that justice toward the poor is an indicator of the degree to which social life moves in the direction of

its ultimate realization in God's Kingdom. In this way the poor carry in themselves the hope and motivation for future change. They are the agents who carry the Kingdom forward. As Dussel states;

> The struggle in the world is a contributive factor in the kingdom of God. The struggle of the poor is the praxis of liberation; it is the activity of the kingdom in history, raised up by Christ by his Spirit, in the intimacy of the hearts of the poor, the carriers of the kingdom.[65]

This brings us to the question of effectiveness. Liberation theologians understand that the dialectical relationship between current historical projects and the future eschatological Kingdom requires socio-political mediation. This mediation must translate the hope of, and faith in, the future into concrete historical possibilities. To achieve this end Liberation theology uses the concept of utopia. As Dussel states; "... between the present system and the eschatological kingdom there is always a third dimension -- the project and the hope it generates of a positive and historical utopia".[66]

Realistic utopia as mediation of historical possibility

Liberation theologians are not in agreement concerning the use of the term 'utopia'. Sobrino uses this term to describe the absolute Kingdom of God and its inspirational relationship to present human endeavour. For Sobrino 'utopic' is an adjective by which he identifies transcendent principles which cannot be adequately translated into historical reality.[67] Boff also identifies the absolute Kingdom as 'utopia'. He understands that the eschatological Kingdom is the absolute utopia which is the fulfilment of human hope. For Boff this absolute utopia functions in teleological relation to all partial and relative utopias of human construction. This teleological understanding is focussed on Jesus Christ who is the realization of absolute utopia in human history. Boff's understanding of utopia functions within a theology of divine teleological immanence. This results in a strong continuity between the absolute utopia of the eschatological Kingdom and the relative utopias of human history. As

Boff states concerning this absolute utopia; "... utopia goes hand in hand with reality rather than being opposed to it; it is the total realization of the potentialities latent in reality".[68]

In contrast to this position is the understanding of utopia put forward by Gutiérrez, Míguez Bonino, and García. They perceive the relationship between the absolute Kingdom and historical utopia to be more indirect and dialectical.[69] As Gutiérrez states;

> The Gospel does not provide a utopia for us; this is a human work. ... But the Gospel is not alien to the historical plan; on the contrary, the human plan and the gift of God imply each other.[70]

These Liberation theologians are careful to distinguish between utopia as human creation and the absolute Kingdom which is the gift of God. They are aware of the danger of sacralizing human social constructions. Rubem Alves exemplifies this recognition that social constructions are human creations and have no direct divine justification.

> ... Christian utopianism understands that what we call 'reality' is a human construction ... . It exists as a reality not because of a divine or demonic necessity but because men in the past built it. And since reality is a human construction, it can be demolished by men in order to build a new one. Whenever we call a provisional social game built by men reality we are involved in idolatry: we are giving ultimacy -- demonic or divine -- to something that is simply human and not destined to eternity.[71]

Within this understanding of utopia as a human construction, these Liberation theologians define utopia as a historical plan for a different society entailing new social relationships. As Gutiérrez states, utopia is "... a historical plan for a qualitatively different society and to express the aspiration to establish new social relations among men".[72] For Latin Americans this historical plan looks to the achievement of fraternal solidarity and the abolition of exploitation. This plan involves the imaginative projection of economic and political structures to achieve these ends. For Gutiérrez the content of this historical plan is social revolution and not reform; liberation and not development; socialism and not modernization of the prevailing system.[73]

Liberation theologians are sensitive to the fact that utopian thought has been subject to the criticism of being unrealistic in its expectations. Alves is representative of the understanding that utopian thought is not the development of impossible societies, but rather the questioning of present societies which leads to imaginative possibilities in the future.

> ... Christian utopianism is not a belief in the possibility of a perfect society but rather the belief in the nonnecessity of *this* imperfect order. It does not claim that it is possible to abolish sin, but it affirms that there is no reason for us to accept the rule of the sinful structures that now control our society.[74]

This positive perception of the possibility of future change of social reality is based on a theological conviction that all human societies stand under the judgement of God.

> Christian utopianism is based on the vision that all social systems are under God's historical judgement. Sooner or later they will die. If this is the case, it is a serious mistake to take these same systems as the ultimate criteria for what is possible and impossible in history.[75]

The development of this historical plan as realistic utopia involves a method which utilizes not only imagination, but also various referents and processes which locate the basis for future hope in present realities. The first of these is the use of reason, and specifically, the use of the analysis and insight of the social sciences. As García states;

> Utopian thinking in a liberation perspective is neither wishful nor illusory thinking. It is that form of creative and imaginative thinking that refuses a adapt itself to the logic and the limits of the status quo. It is informed by the social sciences and thus has some sense of how a given social organization works and what possibilities can emerge within it. It seeks to understand 'what is' for the sake of bringing about its untested possibilities. It understands every social configuration of power as capable of being rearranged in ways that enable those left at the margin to gain a more significant say in the determination of their destiny. It continually projects reality into what it ought to be and can be.[76]

A second process that makes for realistic utopia is the continual translation of this utopia into human agency. As Gutiérrez states; "If utopia does not lead to action in the present, it is an evasion of reality".[77] This means that the utopic future can not exist as an imaginative reality existing soley in the future. For Gutiérrez there can be no sharp distinction between 'means' and 'ends' in ethical agency. Utopia is not a state of socio-political existence that exists exclusively after future political action is carried out. Utopia is to be verified in present praxis. This means that utopian thought is to be understood as a process wherein utopian expectations are continually brought into criticism from the perspective of present praxis. Gutiérrez understands that utopia as imaginative future is legitimate only if it is subject to the verification of praxis. Concerning this imaginative function, Gutiérrez states; "... for utopia validly to fulfil this role, it must be verified in social praxis; it must become effective commitment, without intellectual purisms, without inordinate claims; it must be revised and concretized constantly".[78]

The third element that justifies utopia as realistic is its orientation to the poor. Gutiérrez and García maintain that rationality and praxis have a specific referent in history. It is the poor who are the motivating force for the need of a more just society.[79] As García states;

> From a liberation perspective utopian thinking is integral to the rationality of the poor and oppressed and their efforts to overcome oppression. Utopian thinking relevant to the struggle for social justice feeds itself on the experiences that emerge from the praxis of justice. It rejects ahistorical and uncommitted forms of rationality and utopia, denouncing them as alienating and idealistic.[80]

Gutiérrez perceives that this realistic utopia functions in relation to present social systems in a manner which corresponds to our earlier examination of the Kingdom of God. Utopia serves as annunciation and denunciation in relation to present reality. As already stated, it announces imaginative future possibilities and denounces the unjust realities of the present. But as already stated above, this annunciation and denunciation will have qualities of

realism only to the extent that it is concretized in history by human commitment and agency. As Gutiérrez states;

> Utopia must necessarily lead to a commitment to support the emergence of a new social consciousness and new relationships among people. Otherwise, the denunciation will remain at a purely verbal level and the annunciation will be only an illusion. Authentic utopian thought postulates, enriches, and supplies new goals for political action, while at the same time it is verified by this action. Its fruitfulness depends upon this relationship.[81]

Liberation theology's understanding of the Kingdom of God and of utopia both are subject to Niebuhrian criticism concerning the function of love which is central to the Kingdom and to utopian aspirations. What has earlier been examined concerning the lack of dialectical rigour concerning love applies also to these topics. What will assessed at this point is the temporal relation of the Kingdom and the imaginative function of utopia.

Niebuhrian theology is in agreement with Liberation theology concerning the dialectical nature of the Kingdom of God in relation to history. Niebuhr wants to avoid both dualism and naturalism in his understanding of the Kingdom. He rejects any conception of the Kingdom which restricts it to an absolute perfection in eternity with no relation to time. In response to an unnamed theologian who claimed that the Kingdom functions only as judgement and that our task was not to alter the world but to look to God as the sole agent of change, Niebuhr stated;

> ... I bluntly declare that if I thought for a moment that the Christian gospel meant what is implied in these words, I would prefer not to be a Christian. In such an interpretation, Christian eschatology becomes the source of moral complacency.[82]

In this manner, Niebuhrian theology is in agreement with Liberation theology concerning the Kingdom of God as annunciation of not only future fulfilment but also present possibility. Niebuhrian theology agrees with Sobrino concerning the reality of the 'Kingdom at hand'. As Niebuhr states; "The Kingdom of God is always at hand in the sense that the impossibilities are really possible and lead to new

actualities in given moments of history".[83] This leads Niebuhr to affirm that the *agape* of the Kingdom is a resource for infinite developments towards a more perfect brotherhood in history.[84] Niebuhrian theology agrees with Liberation theology that history is fulfilled and completed by God in the absolute Kingdom of God at the end of time. But the Kingdom of God is not simply the negation of history.[85] Niebuhr understands that there is a continuity between the absolute ideals of the Kingdom and human moral agency. As Niebuhr states;

> Whatever the reality of human sin, the human spirit is still able to recognize the validity of the laws of the Kingdom of God. They are not superimposed upon the moral life by supernatural revelation. They are rather transcendent possibilities implicit in all moral experience.[86]

In dialectical tension with this annunciation is the denunciation or judgement of the absolute Kingdom of God. Niebuhrian theology agrees with Liberation theology that this judgement is a critical force opposed to the injustice of present social systems. As Niebuhr states; "The Kingdom which is not of this world is ... a more dangerous peril to the kingdoms of this world than any competing worldly kingdom".[87] In this dialectic of judgement Niebuhr understands that the Kingdom reveals both the failure of love in human social life and the need of mercy and grace beyond these failures.

> ... the Kingdom of God is not simply trans-historical. It is involved in every moment of history. It is a clue to the fact that every moment of history is a moment of judgement. For it reveals the law of life which life defies and for the defiance of which life is destroyed. But it is also a revelation of mercy and grace in human history.[88]

In this way Niebuhr maintains that all human social achievements are continually under the judgement of the Kingdom of God which reveals the depth of sin involved in all moral achievements. It is for this reason that Niebuhr refuses to identify the Kingdom of God with any actuality of history. Because of the corruption of sin in all human achievements of history Niebuhr looks to locate the Kingdom of God in the 'uneasy conscience of man'.[89]

> If we mean by 'the world' only the realm of actuality, the Kingdom of God is quite obviously not in it. It may be in the conscience of man but not in his action. The same man who dreams of an ideal justice or a perfect love acts according to his own interests when he ceases to contemplate and engages in action.[90]

Niebuhr immediately qualifies this statement with the recognition that the Kingdom is constantly entering the world through human action. Regardless of this, it must be asked from a Liberation perspective whether Niebuhr is subject to the criticism of lacking specificity in identifying the Kingdom with human agency. The issue of causality raised by Segundo and Míguez Bonino can appropriately be applied to Niebuhr. His emphasis on the denunciation or judgement in regard to the Kingdom is more rigorous in its understanding of the perennial nature of sin in human character and agency and is a critical confrontation to Liberation optimism. On the other hand, this emphasis on judgement has a tendency toward the danger of reducing the presence of the Kingdom in human agency to an ideal of human consciousness. Liberation theology correctly understands that this perception of the Kingdom is easily subject to ideological manipulation. Liberation theology seeks to avoid this danger by its understanding of the presence of the Kingdom as the praxis of love and justice which has the poor as its beginning referent. In linking the Kingdom with the poor, Liberation theology creates a permanent location in history where the Kingdom is potentially 'at hand'.

This brings us to the issue of utopia as an imaginative means to project into the future the possibilities of a just society. The use of utopia in Liberation theology has been an issue of debate in recent years between Christian Realists using Niebuhrian analysis and Liberation theology.[91] It will not be the concern of this critique to enter into the development of the argument which has taken place in this debate, but rather to directly place Niebuhrian theology in critical comparison with Liberation theology on the issue of utopia.

The starting place for this critique is Niebuhr and his understanding of imagination in relation to expectations for the future. Niebuhrian theology perceives that imagination is a quality of the human experience of self-transcendence and that this quality

involves the capacity to 'dream' or 'envision' a more perfect justice than is currently realized. Niebuhr observes that this characteristic is especially prevalent in those who suffer oppression. As Niebuhr states; "The disinherited of every age have dreamt of a just society".[92] Niebuhr maintains that the transcendent or 'spiritual' capacity of human life indicates that human agency will always be guided by ideals and goals which are difficult to realize in human history. While one's 'reach' may well be beyond one's 'grasp', these ideals and goals are still relevant and are to be approximated in human existence. As Niebuhr states;

> The beauty and meaning of human life are partially revealed in ideals and aspirations which transcend all possibilities of achievement in history. They may be approximated and each approximation may lead to further visions.[93]

> ... the highest ideals of justice, love and brotherhood are concepts of the human spirit when spirit completely transcends the infirmities of the flesh and the frustrations of history. They must be approximated but they will never be fully realized.[94]

This leads Niebuhr to the conclusion that human agency is limited and finite and yet always oriented in history by goals and 'visions' which are ever on the horizon of human life.

> It is man's ineluctable fate to work on tasks which he cannot complete in his brief span of years, to accept responsibilities the true ends of which he cannot fulfil, and to build communities which cannot realize the perfection of his visions.[95]

Within this understanding of imagination it is appropriate to examine Niebuhr's criticism of utopia. Niebuhr criticises utopian thought and gives it the predicate 'romantic' on the basis of a two-fold illusion. The first element of this illusion is the conviction that community can be characterized by uncoerced harmony of life with life and that the fulfilment of meaning can be achieved in human history by human agency. The second element is directly related to the first and is the basis for it. This is the optimistic assessment of human potential and an obscuring of the perennial human tendency to self-regard and will-to-power.

Niebuhr identifies two groupings of this romantic utopian expectation: soft utopians and hard utopians. Historical examples of soft utopians include secular liberals, christian liberals, and sectarian christians. Niebuhr maintains that all the these groups expect human life to achieve a state of harmony through the progress of history. They understand that the strife and contention of human life will be progressively eliminated by education, the practice of love, or the immanent presence of God.[96] Hard utopians differ from the soft utopians in that they claim that the realization of perfect community will by achieved by means of historical catastrophe. As Niebuhr states;

> The hard utopians create a fighting community which regards itself as the embodiment and champion of an ideal commonwealth of perfect justice or perfect love, for which it is ready to do battle against all enemies.[97]

Historical examples of these hard utopians, identified by Niebuhr, are the continental Anabaptists of the Reformation, the Diggers, Levellers, and Fifth Monarchy Men of seventeenth-century England and contemporary Marxists.[98]

The question must now be raised concerning how this assessment of romantic utopia relates to the realistic utopia of Liberation theology. It is no doubt possible to read some liberation theologians and identify them in categories of either soft or hard utopians. This might be the case with Boff in his understanding of divine immanent teleology. But this is not the case with the core of Liberation theologians which we have been examining. They are careful to identify the eschatological Kingdom of God as the ultimate utopia which only God can achieve and which will mark the end of history. This absolute utopia of harmony of life and fulfilment of meaning is not within the possibilities of human agency. Realistic utopia corresponds to Niebuhr's understanding of relative and approximate historical achievements in relation to an ideal which are in need of continual reassessment and re-creation. In this manner, realistic utopia is a gain in realism in comparison with Niebuhr's understanding of imaginative 'vision' or 'dream'. Liberation theology places the

imaginative 'vision' or 'dream' under the critique of social science, current praxis, and the concrete needs of the poor. For this reason the categories of soft and hard romantic utopianism do not apply simply to Liberation theology.

But this is not to say that the realistic utopianism of Liberation theology is free from the critique of Niebuhrian analysis. While Liberation theology avoids the first illusion of an achievable heaven on earth, it is questionable whether they avoid the second illusion of an optimistic appraisal of human potentiality. As we have already seen in examining the value of love, Liberation theology tends toward optimism concerning human nature. This may in fact undermine the realism of their utopian thought.

From the perspective of Niebuhrian theology it is possible to recognize realistic utopian thought as a legitimate means for human transcendent spirit to project the possibility of future justice. According to Liberation definition, even the Niebuhrian vision of justice as balance of economic and political power qualifies as a radical change, and thus as a 'utopia', in relation to the current economic and political situation of Latin America. What Niebuhrian theology is concerned to hold in tension is a dialectical understanding of utopia. From a Niebuhrian perspective utopia can be understood as both necessity and peril. It is a necessity in that it is a requirement of creative transcendent human consciousness in relation to the future under the absolute value of the Kingdom of God. It is a peril in that this creative imaginative work functions in the dimension where freedom and imagination transmute the will-to-live into the will-to-power and where community and group loyalty is transmuted into collective egoism and imperialism.

NOTES

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4. Victorio Araya, *God and the Poor,* Robert R. Barr trans., Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1987, page 58.
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11. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation,* London, SCM Press, 1974, page 202.
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13. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation,* op. cit., pages 198 and 199.
14. Ibid., page 198.
15. Ismael García, *Justice in Latin American Theology of Liberation,* Atlanta, John Knox Press, 1987, page 101; See also Galilea, op. cit., pages 109 and 110; Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Introduction: Liberation, Theology and Proclamation", in Hugo Assmann, *Practical Theology of Liberation,* London, Search Press, 1975, pages 18 and 19; Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology,* Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1987, page 52; Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor,* op. cit., page 47.
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17. Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor,* op. cit., page 108.
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61. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, op. cit., page 177.
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93. Niebuhr, *Reinhold Niebuhr on Politics,* op. cit., page 13.

94. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics,* New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940, page 193.

95. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Structures of Nations and Empires,* Fairfield, Augustus M. Kelly, 1977 (original publishing date 1959), page 298.

96. Niebuhr, *Faith and History,* op. cit., pages 235 - 239.

97. Ibid., page 237.

98. Ibid., pages 238 and 239.

PART THREE: NIEBUHRIAN THEOLOGY AS LIBERATIVE THEOLOGY

10. CONCLUSION: THEORETICAL ANTECEDENTS TO THE PRACTICE OF JUSTICE

In the above chapters we have examined Niebuhr's understanding of justice and placed this understanding in critical dialogue with Liberation theology of Latin America. In this examination we have not explored how Liberation theology perceives justice to be implemented within the Latin American context. In this regard, Liberation theology is not concerned with general theory but with the specific requirements of the Latin American situation. It is beyond the scope of this study to analyse and assess their interpretation of socio-political life in Latin America and their suggested liberative solutions. This concern falls into the area of practical theology and would require a working knowledge of the specifics of Latin American socio-political and economic life as well as the specific histories of the widely divergent regions of Latin America. Obviously, a study of this nature would be a substantial work in its own right. It has been the intention of this study to focus analysis and assessment on the 'theory' side of the dialectic between theory and praxis.

It will be the thesis of this conclusion that Niebuhrian theology can be inclusive of various dimensions of Liberative theology and be described as 'liberative'. This is particularly true in regard to Liberation theology and its commitment to the poor and oppressed. In this chapter we will be using the term 'Liberative realism' to identify this modified Niebuhrian theology.

In the above critical dialogue between Niebuhrian theology and Liberation theology, Niebuhrian theological method has demonstrated a superior theological dialectic and pragmatic ethic. It will the concern of this conclusion to justify this assessment. At the same time, it is to be recognized that the above dialogue has revealed some serious weaknesses in the content of the Niebuhrian dialectic. In this regard, Liberation theology has challenged Niebuhrian theology concerning its tendency toward being vulnerable to ideological

manipulation.' It will also be the concern of this conclusion to demonstrate that Niebuhrian theology can be integrative of these criticisms and be modified so as to reflect a greater intensity in its prophetic orientation. Thus, it will be intention of this conclusion to present theoretic antecedents to a theology of justice which are inclusive of the general methodology of realism and the specific commitment of liberation.

Liberative realism as liberative method

Theological method in Liberative realism finds its focus in biblical hermeneutic, dialectical theology, and ethical pragmatism. These areas of theological endeavour do not function exclusively, but in mutual modification and interdependence in a dialectical manner. In whatever area of theological endeavour one begins, critical movement takes place between all areas. We will begin our examination with biblical hermeneutic because this area of theological work is the source of themes which form the foundation for theological reflection and ethical practice. As Niebuhrian theology understands, theology has its roots, not in rational theological reflection nor in pragmatic ethical practice, but in the biblical-dramatic world-view.[2] This is also the appropriate beginning place because it is in Niebuhr's hermeneutic that we find the inception of a dialectical weakness that runs throughout his theology.

The strength and weakness of Niebuhr's theology lies in his emphasis on the trans-historical and transcendent. This emphasis finds its inception in his biblical hermeneutic. His weakness in this hermeneutic is the absence of his dialectic. He moves directly from the reading of myth, drama, or symbol, in scripture to the identification of trans-historical and transcendent themes which comprise his religious idealism. The strength of this hermeneutic is that it provides for theological reflection religious ideals which avoid the problems of historicity and which stand as absolute reference points around which reflection and ethics will revolve. The weakness of this hermeneutic is that it does not reflect the dialectic which is the strength of his theology. In this hermeneutic the dialectical

tension and interpenetration of the historical and the trans-historical and the immanent and the transcendent is lost.

In is in this regard that Liberative realism is better served by adopting a modified version of the hermeneutical circle employed by Liberation theology.[3] Liberation theology understands the hermeneutic circle to be a dialectical process which moves between the world of the interpreter and the world of the text. The contribution of Niebuhrian theology to this hermeneutic circle is the application of the Niebuhrian dialectic at each moment in the interpretive process.

The first moment in this hermeneutic circle is that of critical self-awareness. For Liberation theology this means a sociological analysis of the world of the interpreter. This entails an awareness of socio-political structures and economic systems and how these relate to current Church practice, language, and the ideologies implicit in that language. The purpose of this critical self-awareness is the creation of questions which the interpreter in turn takes to the text. Niebuhrian dialectic intensifies this critical self-awareness by emphasizing the recognition that social life is not simply transparent to analysis and that such analysis is subject to distortion by the interests of the interpreter. This means that questions taken to the text must be asked with humility in the knowledge that these questions are relative and parochial and therefore may reflect a certain degree of self-interest and even will-to-power.

The second moment of this hermeneutic circle is that of the reading of the text. For Liberation theology the concern is to identify the historical dimensions of the text. In this manner, recognition of divine agency in the historical world of the text can be fruitful in understanding divine agency in present history. This is not to say that there is a direct correspondence between present socio-political reality and the socio-political reality of the text. It is rather the recognition that the biblical text in its socio-political dimensions provides themes, values, and referents, which are regulative for interpreting the presence and agency of God in current socio-political life. This reading of the text as 'history' is also not restricted to problems of verified historicity. While scientific historicity is always a critical concern, the reading of scripture with

its history-like quality as narrative is still fruitful in representing divine presence and agency in a narrated socio-political 'world' of the text. This narrated 'world' of the text successfully provides themes, values, and referents, which are regulative in theological reflection. This narrative understanding of the text is in agreement with Niebuhr's understanding of scripture as providing a dramatic world-view.

The Niebuhrian dialectic applied to this moment in the interpretive process broadens the possible range of themes which can be found in the reading of the text. The Niebuhrian dialectic also intensifies the dialectic tension between the interpreter and the text. A dialectic interpretation which recognizes the trans-historical as well as historical dimensions of the text results in a more extensive hermeneutic. In this interpretive process, the interpreter may find that the historical dimensions of the text relate to his or her questions which originate in an understanding of current socio-political life. But at the same time, the interpreter may find that there are dimensions of the text which indicate a transcendent referent which reveals the interpreter's questions to be relative, parochial, and even inappropriate. In other words, trans-historical and transcendent themes may in fact call the interpreter and his or her perceptions into question. It is at this point that Niebuhr's understanding of symbol and myth is held in dialectical tension with the historical concerns of Liberation theology. This recognition of the dialectical tension in the reading of the text allows a reading which embraces both existential as well as historical dimensions. Thus, the text may address injustice as a socio-political concern as well as the problems of sin found in human transcendent freedom. This dialectic hermeneutic would be a gain to realism in that it recognizes both the strength of Niebuhrian religious idealism as well as the strength of the historical concerns of Liberation theology.

The third moment in this hermeneutic circle is that of reinterpretation and application. Liberation theology understands that we move from the text back to the current situation with the themes, values, and referents, which our exegetical work has provided. With these resources we reinterpret the current situation and are guided in ethical endeavour. For Liberation theology, this moment is one of

prophecy and ethical action in relation to the socio-political and economic realities of current social life. As a result of this hermeneutic process, Liberation theologians are provided with the themes, values, and referents, by which they can make discriminating decisions concerning the quality of justice found in social existence. From this perspective, Liberation theologians are able to commit themselves to liberative projects which seek greater justice. The Niebuhrian dialectic applied to this moment of the hermeneutic circle qualifies the optimism of Liberation theology concerning reinterpretation and application. Under the dialectical tension of the trans-historical and historical, all historic projects are placed under judgement and all interpretations shown to be distorted by individual and group self-regard and will-to-power. At the same time, this dialectic does not relax the requirement of historical commitment. But it does place this commitment within the context of faith and humility.

This presentation of a dialectic hermeneutic can be no more than suggestive. A thorough study would require much more than the above. But this outline does suggest to us what a hermeneutic circle might look like when Niebuhr's dialectic is maintained with its tension and ambiguity at every moment in the interpretive process. A hermeneutic of this type would be a gain in realism over the hermeneutic employed by Niebuhr. It would recognise the need to maintain the continual tension between the trans-historical and the historical in biblical interpretation. It would also correspond to Niebuhr's theological pragmatism in that this extensive dialectic would successfully address and reveal the height and depth of the divine-human relationship in its existential as well as historical dimensions.

The second area of methodological concern is that of dialectic theology. Liberative realism embraces a dialectic which recognizes the opposition of themes held in unresolvable tension. An example of this dialectic is the opposition of transcendent and organic vitalities in the human subject. The human being is determined by such realities as biological impulse, individual physical attributes, and cultural and social specificity. In dialectical opposition to this limited and determined dimension of human nature is the transcendent dimension which realizes indeterminate possibilities of freedom through

historical creativity, moral agency, reason and imagination, and religious sensibilities. This is a 'dialectic of tension' because these oppositions both interpenetrate one another and exist in conflict with out resolution. For this reason the term; 'dialectic tension', will be used to indicate this ever-present context of opposition of vitalities which exist in dynamic opposition and interpenetration. This dialectic is applicable to all dimensions of reflection. It applies to anthropology, theology, history, and any other theme of concern. For Liberative realism this dialectic has pragmatic justification. This dialectic of tension functions as a successful model for revealing and understanding the ambiguities and the frustrations of human existence and history. This dialectic recognizes both the possibilities and the limitations inherent in human thought, spirit, and endeavour. This dialectic is not a comfortable theoretic posture. It avoids both confident optimism and excessive pessimism. It reminds theological work of the relativity, distortion, and ambiguity, present in all human endeavour, whether rational or ethical. This theology can provide no simple answers and is continually aware of its provisional nature.

The strength of this dialectical theology is that it is integrative, contextual, and dynamic as a theological process. As an integrative theology it follows the pragmatic concern to achieve coherence with the larger environment of ideas and experience. In this manner it is an open theology willing to integrate insights from any source, subject to pragmatic justification. This means that Liberative realism must be a theology of dialogue. In complimentary fashion, the dialectic nature of this theology prevents Liberative realism from claiming any final coherence. The dialectic method forces theology to be self-critical concerning its own areas of tension and ambiguity. As contextual theology, Liberative realism seeks to achieve the pragmatic concern of relevancy in a particular cultural and historical situation. In like manner, the dialectic dimension of theology forces it to recognize its inherent relativity which prevents claims to universality or 'eternal truth'. And finally, because of these various elements, dialectical theology can be described as a dynamic process which seeks continual reform and reformulation.

The choice of this dialectical theology of Liberative realism over the historical dialectic theology of Liberation theology is based in its superior ability to appreciate the possibilities and impossibilities of human existence in its religious and ethical dimensions. The content of this difference between Liberative realism and Liberation theology will be dealt with below. At this point it is appropriate to indicate the weakness in the content of Niebuhr's dialectic. At the heart of Niebuhr's theology is the dialectic between anthropological realism and religious idealism. As already indicated above in the concern for biblical hermeneutic, this religious idealism must be questioned concerning its dialectic rigour. This is not a criticism of method, but rather of content. From the perspective of Liberation theology, Niebuhr's dialectic lacks a sufficiently concrete historical referent. This lack of historical referent may weaken the dynamic nature of Niebuhrian theology. The transcendent and trans-historical understanding of the divine is not held in tension with a corresponding immanent and historical referent which is specific.[4] From a pragmatic perspective, it must be questioned whether this religious idealism adequately incorporates the human experience of the divine in the height of her or his spiritual transcendence as well as in the concreteness of historical existence. From the perspective of Liberative realism which seeks to be integrative concerning the insights of Liberation theology, these dimensions need to be held in dialectic tension. From this point in our examination we will be using the term 'religious realism' to indicate a more thorough dialectic which includes both the idealism of Niebuhr's transcendent and trans-historical concerns as well as the concern for the historical specificity of Liberation theology.

The third area of our examination is that of pragmatic ethics. While we are considering the area of ethics last in our examination, it is in fact the centre of theological methodology. Liberative realism agrees with Liberation theology that the christian faith is first and foremost relational. In this sense it understands the rational work of theology to be a 'second step' in service of life lived in relation to God and other human beings.[5] It is for this reason that love and justice are not to be understood as the mere conclusions of an equation

of theological logic. Rather, love and justice are the central concerns around which theology seeks illumination and coherence. In this pursuit of illumination and coherence, the relationship between theology and ethics is dialectic in nature. Theology and its work of biblical hermeneutic provides regulative themes, values, and referents, which are embraced by faith and verified in action and religious experience. In dialectical tension with this function of theology is the transcendent height and historical concreteness of lived faith which will call into question theological rationality. Thus, it is at the point of lived faith that theological concerns are either justified or questioned. It is also at this point that biblical themes are understood to be 'authoritative'. In terms of religious realism the 'historical Jesus' of Libèration theology and the 'Christ myth' of Niebuhrian theology are authoritative according to their ability to reveal and illuminate the trans-historical as well as the historical dimensions of human life in relation to God and other humans.

This brings us to the point where we must justify our choice of pragmatism over praxis as an epistemological model. Liberation theology contends that knowledge is obtained in the modification or transformation of reality. It is in historical praxis that theological truth finds verification. This position is similar to that of pragmatism but is to be judged as inadequate according to Liberative realism.[6] Niebuhrian theology recognizes that human beings are transcendent creatures as well as creatures of history. From this perspective, pragmatism functions in reference to the 'spiritual' and transcendent dimension of religious experience as well as the concrete creativity of historical existence. It is in this regard that the religious experience of justification by faith is verified in the dimension of human transcendent spirituality but can not be verified by a historical praxis. This is not to deny the historical dimension as a locus of justification of theological reflection. It is rather the recognition that the pragmatic method can include a broader realm of human experience which is both trans-historical and historical. The utilization of historical praxis by Liberation theology tends to neglect this transcendent dimension of human experience.

The second criticism of historical praxis is concerned with its function in relation to history. Liberative realism understands that knowledge which is the result of pragmatic method is qualified by a dialectic which recognizes the limited nature of all human knowledge as well as the perennial presence of sin in all efforts at knowledge. This means that realism must take issue with the optimism of Liberation theology and its use of historical praxis concerning the transparency of historical experience. For Niebuhrian theology there is always a quality of 'hiddeness' concerning the meaning of history. This means that relativity and ambiguity are never resolved in human historical agency.[7] This is not to deny ethical optimism, but rather to qualify such optimism with the realities of limitation and possibility understood within anthropological realism. In the same manner the pragmatic method is qualified by the recognition of the presence of self-regard and will-to-power in all human historical agency. Once again the optimism that results from historical praxis is questioned and qualified. It is because of this dialectical dimension that pragmatism is understood to be more successful as an epistemological model. This model holds in tension the perception that knowledge is both verified by human experience and action and also is to be held as provisional by the very limitations of human experience and action.

This brings us to consider pragmatic ethic as a liberative ethic. Niebuhrian theology maintains that ethical action occurs within the dialectical tension of anthropological realism and religious idealism. In regard to anthropological realism, pragmatic ethics can be described as a consequential ethic. In other words, ethics seeks the optimal course of action within the limitations and possibilities inherent in the realist understanding of human existence. In regard to religious idealism, pragmatic ethics can be described as a dispositional ethic. In this manner, ethics is guided to seek the most successful approximation to ideals which are both existential and historical in nature. In this regard it is the ideals of *agape* and the Kingdom of God which are regulative for the ethical disposition. This relationship of ethical action to ideals is dialectic in that *agape* indicates the transcendent dimension of human nature while the Kingdom of God indicates the trans-historical dimension in terms of the future.

It is here again that we encounter the weakness of content in the Niebuhrian dialectic. Niebuhr's religious idealism is realized in a disposition which limits the dialectic to a realm in human consciousness. It is once again from the perspective of Liberation theology that we must modify Niebuhr's dialectic to realize a more substantial dialectic which can be described as 'liberative'. If we adopt a dialectic of religious realism, then we are moved to embrace the Liberation concept of 'solidarity' in regard to a particular referent of history. This would mean placing 'disposition' and 'solidarity' in dialectical tension in relation to ethics. In this regard 'disposition' refers to the trans-historical norms of Niebuhrian theology while 'solidarity' refers to the specific historical commitment of Liberation theology.

It is within this dialectical tension of anthropological realism and religious realism that the pragmatic ethic is justified. Religious realism allows ethical action to identify 'ends' which can be stated with clarity. From the perspective of religious realism one can identify both trans-historical ideals and historical referents which give ethical action its orientation. But while the identification of 'ends' is relatively uncomplicated, the 'means' to these 'ends' are plagued with ambiguity in relation to anthropological realism. It is within this dialectic tension that ethical action must seek relative, approximate, and optimal, 'means' under the guidance of ideal and historical 'ends'. Because pragmatic ethics is qualified by this dialectical dimension, it is to be described in the same manner as dialectical theology. It is to be understood as integrative, contextual, and a dynamic process.

This brings to a conclusion our examination of the modification of the method of Niebuhrian theology which results in a more 'liberative' orientation. It is now appropriate to move to examine the general theoretical positions taken by Liberative realism which form the conceptual horizon for the specific elements of a theology of justice.

General conceptual framework in which a theology of justice is developed

Liberative realism takes issue with Liberation theology concerning three major areas of theory which are antecedent to a theology of justice. These theoretical horizons indicate the limits to which a theology of justice will conform. Due to the methodology indicated above, these limits set by Liberative realism are not to be understood as hard and fast. But Liberative realism does perceive these theoretical horizons to be justified in human experience and relevant to contemporary discussion of justice. These conceptual horizons have to do with the comprehension of and decisions concerning: nature, sin, and divine presence. In relation to these themes, Liberative realism and Liberation theology come into conflict concerning history and the potential creation of justice. Thus, as we consider these different conceptual horizons, an understanding of the possibilities of justice in history will be the central concern.

Cosmological horizon

For Liberative realism the cosmos is perceived as an environment of conflict. It is a temporal flux wherein unity and chaos, harmony and anarchy are seen to be in continual dialectical tension. For Niebuhr, this world of nature is exemplified by the anarchy and harmony of the forest.[8] In the forest species of life live by the death of the other forms of life. This exemplifies the conflict and chaos of biological life in its struggle to survive. But in the same manner, harmony is present in this chaos in that all the species of life continue to survive.

For the human being, this world of nature is both environment and a fundamental dimension of human nature. The human being is a finite organism living in a passing flux of time and change. He or she is the prisoner of partial perspectives and subject to inner biological impulse. In this regard the human being is subject to contingent and arbitrary determinisms. He or she is subject to the fate of sex, race,

geographical location and physical individuality. It is in this dimension of human organic life that inequality has its inception.

It is because human life is rooted in nature-necessity that it is limited concerning historical ambitions. The world of nature creates continual ambiguity and inertia in regard to the relative achievements of human beings. Human beings can never step outside their relationship to nature. They are, by nature, a part of the dialectic of unity and chaos, harmony and anarchy, which makes organic life one of conflict and change. This means that human reason and agency is always limited and relative. From the perspective of human reason, the cosmos exhibits boundaries which limit intelligibility. For the human being, the meaning of the cosmos is a mystery. In terms of human agency, human beings discover that historical existence is always fragmentary and contradictory. It is for this reason that the optimal expectations of history will be realized in provisional meanings, judgements, and fulfilments, in history. Niebuhrian theology provides the term 'irony' as a category descriptive of this relative and ambiguous dimension of nature and history. Because of the relative and ambiguous condition of human organic life, intentions and results do not always correspond in realized history. Human beings are caught in the 'irony' of life when the limitations of their perspective is revealed in the failures of historical endeavour.

From this perspective of the world of nature and its relation to history, the concept of progress has limited application. While it can relate to the cumulation of knowledge or growth in technology, or even biological evolution, it can not indicate the elimination of the fundamental limitations to which the human being is subject as an organic being. From the perspective of Niebuhrian theology, progress can be equally toward chaos as well as unity, anarchy as well as harmony.

Liberation theology does not necessarily disagree with the position of Liberative realism concerning the limits of human organic existence. Rather, Liberation theology treats this concern as insignificant in comparison to the determinative presence of the divine in human beings and in history. This issue of divine presence will be addressed below. From the perspective of Liberative realism this

reveals an inadequate understanding of the relationship between the organic nature of human beings and socio-political injustice realized in history. It neglects the dialectic presence of the organic sources of conflict, inequality, and tension, which are the foundations for all expressions of injustice in history. For Liberative realism, the achievement of relative justice must take with seriousness these organic dimensions of dialectical tension. It must seek to mitigate, redirect, and even use, such forces for the achievement of a relative justice within the ambiguities of historical life.

This brings us to consider another theoretical horizon of Liberative realism. The understanding of human nature and sin further complicates the basic relative and ambiguous character of organic human life.

Anthropological horizon

Liberative realism understands that human life is lived in the context of a dialectic in which sin is its perennial characteristic. On one side of this dialectic is the organic dimension of human life. This organic dimension of life is characterised by finitude, change, and conflict of life with life. The other side of this dialectic is the transcendent dimensions of human life. These include the creative potentials of reason and imagination. This transcendent dimension also includes the religious capacity by which the human being apprehends a unity and coherence beyond itself. This side of the dialectic can be identified as the 'spiritual'. It is the dimension of self-transcendence.

This dialectic between the organic and spiritual dimensions of human life is such that it produces anxiety for the human subject. The human being has a 'reach that is beyond his or her grasp'. The capacities of reason, imagination, and religious sensibility, allow the human being to want to be more, know more, have more, and do more, than her or his finite organic nature will allow. It is within this dialectical tension that Liberative realism perceives the occasion for sin. This dialectical context within which sin finds fruition can not be diminished by education, moral incentive, or social restructuring.

This anxiety, which exists as a result of dialectic tension between the organic and the spiritual, is fundamental to human nature.

While this anxiety is the occasion for sin, it is not to be understood as the source of sin. Sin has its inception in the freedom of spiritual life. For Liberative realism, sin is actualized when the human being seeks security through pretension. This pretension is revealed in the expansion of the self whereby the self claims significance and power which are not justified according to organic life. This sin is inevitable for human beings as surely as freedom is a quality of human existence. In this manner the human seeks to resolve existential anxiety by a denial of his or her finite and relative qualities. Niebuhrian theology identifies this sin as pride. Pride is the expansion of the self through reason, imagination, and religious sensibilities. Through reason and imagination this pride transmutes the organic will-to-live into the will-to-power. This will-to-power is revealed in social existence in socio-political structures which achieve security at the expense of other human life. It is this pride which allows the human being to claim certainty for partial knowledge and to universalize a particular interpretation of history which can be used to justify oppression. It is this desire for self expansion and self-regard that leads the human being to give socio-political movements the sanctity of religious justification. In this way the human being achieves religious transcendence, meaning, and prestige, by identifying with a larger social power or movement.

This sin of pride achieves greater intensity in terms of group or collective existence. Niebuhrian theology understands that groups are far more ruthless and egoistic than the individual. The group lacks the transcendent capacities which inform the individual conscience. At its best, it achieves the ethical mediocrity of group consensus. At its worse, the collective will-to-power finds justification in emotive ambitions rooted in the organic conflict of life with life. For this reason the group tends to respond less to rational and spiritual impulse and more to emotional and organic impulse. This results in the group responding to immediate needs without reflection on long term results. It is for this same reason the group tends to misappropriate power in order to achieve collective security. And in a corresponding

manner the group claims ultimacy for its interpretations of history and life in order to justify the oppression and violence which is the means to this security.

A dimension of this sin of pride is what Niebuhr identifies as 'sensuality'. This form of sin occurs when the human subject denies his or her freedom by loosing one's self in the vitalities of nature or society. This understanding of sin as 'sensuality' has come under criticism by Feminist theologians.[9] They observe that emphasis on sin as pride addresses the sin of power, but not the sin of powerlessness. Liberative realism gains in dialectical rigour by integrating these insights of Feminist theology into a balanced dialectic. This dialectical understanding of sin perceives that sin as pride is to be held in tension with sin as humility. Where sin as pride refers to human self-regard and will-to-power, sin as humility refers to human self-deprivation and complicity with loss of power. For Feminist theologians the problem of sin as humility is not the expansion of the self, but rather the lack of a realized self. In sin as humility the human being does not realize his or her individual potentialities and becomes the mere appendage of others. Liberation theology is also aware of this sin of humility.[10] They identify this sin as one of avoiding responsibility and withdrawing from the conflicts of life.

Liberative realism recognizes that this sin of humility has a religious dimension which corresponds to that of the sin of pride. The sin of pride seeks to expand the prestige of the self through identification with social movements which it gives the prestige of 'religious' justification. In this way the individual borrows the prestige of the group for its self. In a corresponding manner the sin of humility seeks to lose freedom and responsibility by giving the self to something greater than its self. In this way the human being realizes the religious experience of self-giving transcendence in regard to a greater power. This is sin in that it is a way of losing the self in its freedom and responsibility to something which is partial and finite.

It is concerning this understanding of sin that Liberative realism enters into serious disagreement with Liberation theology. This disagreement is not in regard to sin as embodied in socio-political

structures and economic systems. Rather it is in regard to where sin has its origin and inception. Liberation theology understands that sin exists within a circular relationship between the individual and his or her socio-political and cultural environment. In this circular relationship, Liberation theology is concerned to emphasize the conditioning role of environment. They understand that this environment embodies structural sin which conditions human life to alienation, oppression, and exploitation. Thus, they are concerned with the restructuring of society in such a way that it embodies justice and conditions human life to community and solidarity. Within this liberating environment it is possible for the human being to become a 'new self' characterized by mutuality and love.''

Liberative realism does not disagree with this concern for a more just socio-political environment which conditions the human being to achieve greater mutuality in social life. Realism does not disagree with the possibility of modifying, reforming, or revolutionary restructuring of social systems in favour of greater justice. Where Liberative realism disagrees with Liberation theology is concerning the optimism of such an endeavour. This difference of optimism directly relates to the understanding of where sin has its inception in human life. Liberation theology is concerned with the creative capacity of human life wherein human beings can recreate themselves as 'new selves' by recreating their socio-political and economic environment or 'world'. This optimism is possible for Liberation theology because they understand the origin and inception of sin to be outside the transcendent, 'spiritual', dimension of creativity. They understand sin to have its origin and inception in organic weakness or social conditioning. In this manner they understand that sin is a fault or lack which is subject to rectification. This is a major point of difference between Liberation theology and Liberative realism. Realism qualifies the creative optimism of human endeavour with the insight that sin has its origin and inception in the creative and imaginative capacity of human life. From the perspective of Liberative realism, the human being is capable of creating socio-political and economic realities which approximate a greater justice and encourage a more humane life. But at the same time it understands that all creative

endeavours of human agency are subject to distortion by the self-regard and will-to-power of individuals and groups. It is for this reason that Niebuhrian theology emphasizes the 'new self' as one which is aware of perennial sin in human achievement and is one which must live by faith and humility under a forgiveness which transcends human endeavour.

This difference in the understanding of sin directly relates to expectations concerning history. Liberation theology displays an optimism concerning progress in history which Liberative realism can not embrace. Liberative realism understands that human endeavour in history is not only qualified by the parochial and partial perspectives, but also by the perennial distortion by sin. From this perspective, the achievement of greater justice in history also provides new conditions and opportunities for injustice. Liberative realism understands that historical achievement does not resolve the inevitability of self-regard and will-to-power in individuals or its more excessive expressions in collective behaviour. It is for this reason that Niebuhr recognized the biblical symbol of the 'anti-christ' as indicating the growth of injustice in history till the end of time. In this manner history is not only characterized by 'irony' in terms of partial and parochial perspectives, but also is subject to 'tragedy' when effort at greater justice is distorted by sin and becomes the new source of injustice.

This brings us to consider the final theoretical horizon which determines the development of a theology of justice. This horizon is concerned with divine presence and agency in regard to the cosmos and human life.

Theological horizon

Our examination of the presence and agency of God in regard to the cosmos and human life will focus on the tension of the dialectic between transcendence and immanence, or the trans-historical and the historical. This dialectic is determinative in regard to all theological themes of Liberative realism.

In regard to the cosmos, Liberative realism understands that reality is God's creation. God is the creator of time and history and transcends this world at the limits of its beginning and end. Thus God is identified with the mystery which surrounds our existence. While God is transcendent and not to be identified directly with creation, God is also immanent in time and history. In Niebuhrian language, God is both the pinnacle and the basis of reality; both the goal toward which life strives and the force by which it strives.'[12] In this manner, God is the 'hidden' basis of reality. Liberative realism understands that God is epistemologically transcendent. God is present in, and is the ground of, reality. And yet God is not epistemologically available to human perception or analysis. This is not to mean that the cosmos lacks theological significance. According to Niebuhrian theology, cosmic reality indicates the impartiality of God. In this regard nature shows no partiality toward human life. Nature is impartial as it hands out disaster or blessing. Niebuhrian theology understands this to be an expression of divine grace and judgement. It is grace in that we receive the benefits of nature regardless of personal qualities. But in the same manner it is judgement in that we are equally subject to the destructive dimensions of nature regardless of merit.

It is because of this dimension of mystery concerning the 'hidden' God that the meaning of reality comes only through revelation. It is through revelation that love is revealed to be the law of life and the Kingdom of God to be the final consummation of historical existence. These themes partake of this same dialectical tension. They are revelations of divine intention and will and indicate a dialectic of judgement and mercy upon all human agency and historical existence. They are transcendent and trans-historical norms which judge all ambiguous and partial human achievements. And yet they are immanent in human life in that they are relevant in every moment of human existence. They are the occasion for judgement and forgiveness in regard to human endeavour. They both inspire greater achievements and reveal the partial nature of all achievements.

Liberative realism understands that this revelation of meaning, and fulfilment of meaning, occurs in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ we

find revealed the dialectic between the 'telos' of history and the 'finis' of history. The telos or 'end' is the revelation of meaning. In this regard we find that love is the 'hidden' meaning of life and the Kingdom of God is its intention. But this meaning remains 'hidden' in terms of historical achievement. It is not a meaning which is capable of being made explicit in human agency due to the limitations of nature-necessity and the distortions of sin. In this way Jesus Christ is also the revelation of the finis or 'end' as divine act. It is by divine agency that human life and history will fulfil its meaning and intention. Thus, human life and history will have a termination wherein it will be transformed to achieve its telos.

It is within this dialectical understanding that salvation and grace is to be understood. From the Niebuhrian perspective, grace is both a power over human life and a power in human life. It is a transcendent and trans-historical power over human life in that only divine forgiveness can resolve and complete the desires and distortions of the human transcendent spirit. Thus, it is justification by grace through faith which is divine power over human life. In corresponding manner, God is sovereign over history and is the power which will complete all human partial endeavour. But grace is also an immanent and historical power in human beings in that it is the source of judgement and mercy which gives rise to faith and hope. In this way, divine forgiveness and promise frees human agency concerning its inadequacies. The human being can engage in historical activity in the sure knowledge that divine agency will rectify and complete the partial and distorted efforts of human endeavour.

This understanding of the dialectic nature of divine agency and presence has specific application in regard to human historical achievement. While God is understood as immanent and as a power in human life, this does not remove the limitations of organic life or the distortions by sin in the spiritual dimension of human life. Niebuhrian theology understands that history is an interim between the revelation of the meaning of history and the consummation of that meaning. This means that present history remains ambiguous and subject to human distortion through self-regard and will-to-power. Here again we find the dialectic. Human history seeks to fulfil its meaning and

intention and is empowered in that endeavour by the revelation of meaning and the immanent presence of God as power in human life. And yet human history remains partial and parochial and is not capable of achieving these ends. Only a power over history, a sovereign God of history, can bring history to its completion. And this can only be achieved by the removal of organic limitation and human sin. For this reason the consummation of history is to be understood as a termination wherein God will transform this world.

This Niebuhrian understanding of divine transcendence and immanence is in stark contrast to the Liberation theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez and Leonardo Boff. Both of these theologians understand the cosmos to be infused with divine grace.[13] This understanding of divine immanence understands God to be a constitutive element of reality, of human nature, and of history. In this regard Gutiérrez emphasizes God's presence as an immanent creative force in history. He perceives the initial creation of the cosmos to be the beginning of an evolutionary creationism wherein human beings are invited to participate in ongoing divine creation in history. In similar manner, Boff emphasizes divine immanence as a teleological force in history which is bringing creation and history to its consummation. This optimism concerning the divine role in history is reinforced by their perspective on sin. Both these theologians understand sin and evil to be an aberration in a cosmos determined by grace. Reality is to be understood as a divine milieu in which human rebellion is unequal to the creative and teleological presence of grace.

From the perspective of Liberative realism, this understanding of divine immanence lacks a dialectic of transcendence. This lack of transcendence allows Liberation theology to give human beings, history, and nature itself, a positive ethical value which is not justified by human experience. With this optimism concerning divine presence, these theologians assume a transparency concerning the ability to perceive and assess the meaning of history and the will of God. Liberative realism qualifies such optimism with its understanding of organic limitation and the perennial presence of sin. From the perspective of Liberative realism, knowledge and value judgements concerning social and historical existence are never as clear and unambiguous as

Liberation theology sometimes assumes. In this way realism qualifies the historical optimism of Liberation theology with the insight that all human endeavour stands under a transcendent dimension which judges and reveals our inevitable individual and collective self-regard and will-to-power.

This criticism concerning divine immanence does not apply to all Liberation theologians. Ismael García and José Míguez Bonino present a Liberation theology which does not embrace this understanding of divine presence as constitutive of human beings, history, and nature.[14] This difference is significant in regard to their understanding of the role of the poor and oppressed. In agreement with Liberative realism they reject any sacralization of any particular social group. They can not accept the optimism with which Gutiérrez and Boff understand this specific group to be the carriers of historical meaning and salvation. But this is not to say that García and Míguez Bonino do not perceive the poor and oppressed to have theological significance. It is at this point that they challenge Niebuhrian theology. While Niebuhrian theology retains a dialectic strength concerning divine transcendence, it must be questioned concerning the concreteness of its understanding of immanence. In this regard the Niebuhrian dialectic seems to be lacking a real historical dimension. At best it seems to recognize the divine dimension in the moral consciousness of human beings.

This problem finds a focus in the understanding of *agape* and the promise of the Kingdom of God. In Niebuhrian theology these themes find their strength as transcendent and trans-historical concepts which impinge on the moral consciousness of human beings. Critics of this perspective have observed that the weakness of this position is that it lacks dialectic rigour wherein the transcendent and trans-historical is balanced by the immanent and historical.[15] Feminist theologians point out that Niebuhrian divine self-giving love appears as an abstraction of the full dimensions of love which occur in relationships. They are suspicious of this apparent 'idealism' which makes self-sacrifice a norm. They understand that this norm can be used to serve injustice. The norm of self-sacrifice is oppressive when applied to those who are denied the will-to-live. In this situation, love as mutuality is the more significant norm. From the perspective of Feminist theology, the

dialectic between transcendent self-giving love and immanent mutual love needs a more positive relationship. This would lead to an understanding of divine love that is gratuitous and forgives our failures, and which is also a love that expects us to achieve our full potential as human beings. In this regard, divine love is also perceived to have dimensions of mutuality. While divine love is initially self-giving, it is also a love which takes the human subject with a seriousness that requires reciprocal self-giving. In this way divine love has expectations in reference to the human being. The strength of Liberation theology is the recognition that this divine love requires discipleship and a spirituality which is realized in historical existence.

It is within this concern that García and Míguez Bonino illustrate the historical dimension of this dialectic. They recognize that divine transcendent love is universal and is self-giving in regard to all human beings. At the same time they maintain that is love is not to be understood as impartial. This universal love is preferential toward particular human beings in history. This divine preferential love is not based on human merit, but rather on human need. In this way transcendent love finds immanent expression in regard to a specific historical referent. This understanding is a gain to Niebuhrian theology in that it demonstrates a more balanced and rigorous dialectic of love. It avoids the danger of identifying divine immanence with the particular projects of history and at the same time pushes divine immanence beyond mere reference to human moral consciousness. In this way *agape* and the promise of the Kingdom have a specific historical referent. It is love and promise addressed first to those in need for the sake of all.

This balanced dialectic also reinforces another historical dimension which is lacking in Niebuhrian theology. Because Niebuhrian theology emphasizes the transcendent dimension of the divine and the transcendent moral consciousness of the human, the dialectic has tended to focus on judgement and mercy and justification by grace through faith. As Liberation theology has rightly observed, this emphasis on the transcendent has the danger of weakening historical commitment. When divine universal transcendent love is balanced by a love in

solidarity with specific human beings, then the relationship with God entails historical commitment. In this way faith and hope is not simply identified in relation to the human consciousness which exists under the transcendent norms of love and the Kingdom of God. Faith and hope function in relation to a historical commitment to specific people to whom this love and the Kingdom is first addressed. This means that faith as a universally available relationship with God realized through justification by grace must be held in dialectical tension with historical commitment and faith lived as discipleship.

This brings to a conclusion our examination of the general theoretical horizons to a theology of justice as understood by Liberative realism. As we have observed, this Liberative realism is modified beyond Niebuhrian theology to embrace a more liberative commitment to history. At the same time, we must recognize that this examination of theoretic horizons is negative in function. We have been examining the limitations to human ambition in history. In this way we have been identifying the 'impossibilities' which determine the theology of justice. These 'impossibilities' can be simply identified as; the limitations of organic life, the distortion of life rooted in the human spirit, and the 'otherness' of God in regard to historical endeavour. As we move to examine the more specific elements of a theology of justice we will find that we are exploring the 'possibilities' of human life and history. This understanding of 'possibility' and 'impossibility' needs to be held in dialectic tension. The theoretical horizons determine the limits and 'impossibilities' of human agency and history. But in tension with these 'impossibilities' is the discovery of what is possible in human agency and history. This may lead to re-evaluate and modify our horizons.

Specific elements of a theology of justice within Liberative realism

With the identification of the theoretical horizons of justice in place, it is now possible to examine the specific themes which are constitutive of a theology of justice. This examination will be comprised of three parts. The first part will deal with justice as a

human creation. The second part will deal with justice as human possibility and necessity. And the third part will deal in detail with justice as an approximation to divine will.

Justice as human phenomenon

Liberative realism understands justice to be fundamentally a human creation necessitated by the conflictive nature of social existence. This conflictive nature of social life requires the creation and utilization of artifacts of social justice. These artifacts are; political structures, economic systems, legal systems and law, and police power. This creative activity of human collective life is guided by values, historical referents, and future goals, provided by organic and transcendent dimensions of human life. Organic life provides justice with a foundation in community. Community provides the natural coherences which make social life possible. These organic coherences are relational hierarchy, common memory, common language, and geographical boundaries. This organic realm is the source for such values as freedom and equality. Freedom relates to the transcendent dimension of the individual which the intimate community will hold as a value and will protect and respect. Equality is the logical equivalent of mutual love that is experienced in intimate community. It is the task of justice to implement these values of organic community in the more complex and less intimate context of human social life.

In like manner, the creation of justice is guided by the transcendent norms of divine love and the promise of the Kingdom of God. In regard to divine love, the universal and preferential dimensions of love challenge creative justice to recognize equality and freedom as limited approximations and to find in particular groups in social life the evidence of such limitations. In regard to the Kingdom of God, the dimension of future possibility opens the present to the creation of realistic utopia. This creation of realistic utopia serves justice through creative imagination applied to future economic and political possibility.

The concern of Liberative realism is to maintain the understanding that justice is a human creation which is realized in the context of

dialectical tension found in the organic and transcendent dimensions of human life and can not be equated directly with either. Organic, intimate community achieves a mutuality of love which can not be achieved on the level of complex and ambiguous social life. For this reason justice is to be held in dialectical tension with the possibilities of organic community life. In like manner, justice can not be simply equated with divine love and the Kingdom of God. Justice is created in the conflict and ambiguity of nature-necessity and the social propensity toward sin in human collective life. It is for this reason that Liberative realism takes issue with Liberation theology concerning its understanding of divine immanence in the historical realization of justice and its optimistic assessment of organic reality. Liberative realism maintains that justice is fundamentally a human creation and reflects the full potentials and distortions of human existence.

It is within this context of dialectic tension that the creation of justice must be understood as integrative, contextual, and dynamic. The creation of justice is integrative in that it seeks coherence with a larger environment of ideas and experience. This means that the pursuit of justice must be dialogical and open-ended. It can not claim finality or be exclusive in regard to other attempts to create justice. Liberative realism is suspicious of Liberation theology in this regard. It perceives the historical praxis of Liberation theology as being in danger of a myopia which does not look beyond its parochial concerns. This myopia finds expression in their adoption of social analysis which rejects capitalism, social classes, and international dependency.[16] The suspicion of Liberative realism is that these realities have been rejected with a finality which prevents discussion.

Liberative realism also understands justice to be contextual and pragmatic. Justice is created within a specific cultural and historical context. Within this context it seeks to create the artifacts of justice which will be successful in the production of greater social justice. From this perspective, Liberative realism recognizes the legitimacy of Liberation theology and its social analysis. From the perspective of Latin America the realities of capitalism, social class, and international dependency, have been major

forces for injustice. And Liberative realism agrees with Liberation theology that these realities need drastic modification if justice is to be achieved. But Liberative realism does not agree with a distinction between capitalism and socialism as a means to justice. Neither does it agree with the possibility of a society without class or group conflict. And similarly, realism also has difficulty with an understanding of nationalistic liberation if this liberation assumes political and economic isolation. For Liberative realism, these concerns must submit to pragmatic resolution within the national as well as international context.

It is because the creation of justice is understood as integrative and contextual that it can be described as a dynamic process. Justice cannot be defined by a model, paradigm, or regulative equation. It is to be understood as a process wherein prudent reason seeks to adapt values, historical commitments, and future hopes, into the complexities and ambiguities of human social existence. These values, historical commitments, or future hopes, do not represent a fixed hierarchy. The hierarchy of importance of these themes will vary according to the context to which they are applied. It is in regard to this culture-specific determined hierarchy of regulative themes that the artifacts of justice will seek approximation. Liberative realism understands that this creation of justice is a continual process for social life. In changing historical existence, the hierarchy of values shift according to social change and need. For this reason the artifacts of social life will also continually change to meet the new needs of social existence. All that can be said definitively of justice is that it is the continual attempt of social existence to approximate the norms of transcendent life and extend the coherences of organic life within the possibilities and limitations of human agency. It is now to an explicit consideration of these possibilities and limitations that we now turn.

Justice as human possibility and necessity

Liberative realism understands that social justice is both a possibility and a necessity. It is a possibility to the degree that

human reason and creativity can extend the natural coherences of organic life under the inspiration of regulative values, historical commitments, and future hope. It is a necessity in that reason and imagination expressed in human endeavour also extend natural forces for chaos and anarchy. Social justice is necessitated by the rationality and creativity of human beings which extends the will-to-power and egoism of groups in the conflict of life with life. It is concerning this dialectic between possibility and necessity that Liberative realism comes into conflict with Liberation theology. Liberative realism perceives that Liberation theology lacks dialectic rigor in regard to the realization of social justice. Realism understands that social justice stands in dialectical tension with both its organic foundation and its transcendent and trans-historical norms. It is this dialectical tension which is lacking in Liberation theology. In the following we will examine the content of this dialectic tension and its relevance to social justice.

The beginning point for the consideration of this dialectic is the relationship between social justice and organic life. Social justice has its foundation in the natural coherence of intimate community. In intimate community there is no need for principles or prudent calculation to guide human relationships. In intimate community human beings achieve a collective life wherein the needs and desires of each is known to all. In this context justice is implicit in the intimacy of communal life. It is here that love as mutuality finds its natural and fullest expression. Niebuhrian theology understands that it is intimate community which provides the organic coherence upon which all social justice is built.[17] It is the implicit justice found in intimate community which is translated into explicit principles which guide the creation of artifacts of justice. From the Niebuhrian perspective, social justice is not possible if it is not grounded in the natural coherences of community life. It is in relation to these natural coherences that social justice obtains its legitimacy.

This Niebuhrian understanding of the role of intimate community is expanded when placed in comparison with Liberation theology concerning Christian Base Communities. The role of intimate communities in regard to social justice is intensified by integration of the role of

Christian Base Communities. Liberation theology understands that Base Communities are involved in theological reflection which includes biblical interpretation and socio-political conscientization. It is this reflective process in christian communities which leads to commitment to the poor and oppressed. In this manner, intimate communities are not only to be perceived as the the context in which mutuality is achieved. They are also the context where socio-political and religious critical awareness is increased in regard to social justice. These Christian Base Communities of Latin America are not to be understood as general models for intimate christian community. Christian Base Communities are the culture-specific realization of intimate community as understood by Niebuhrian theology. These Christian Base Communities are intimate christian communities which are the organic foundation for the values, commitments, and hopes, which can guide the achievement of social justice in Latin America. A general understanding of intimate christian community includes the elements of mutuality, conscientization, and solidarity. But the form that these intimate communities take will be culture-specific and no one expression of community is to be valued over another. What is valued in various forms of community is the common features of intimacy and the process by which people come into awareness of human need and respond to that need.

With this understanding of intimate community we can move to consider the dialectical relationship between intimate community and social justice. This relationship involves both continuity and discontinuity. In terms of continuity, intimate community provides the quality of human relationships which social justice wishes to approximate. By means of human rationality and creativity, the implicit justice of intimate community is translated into regulative principles which will guide the creation of artifacts of justice. Niebuhrian theology understands that the principles of equality and freedom are the result of this rational process. To these two regulative principles, Liberation theology could add the principle of solidarity. Liberation theology has not explored the organic origin of this principle in intimate community. They have been concerned with the justification of this principle from the perspective of divine

preferential love. But solidarity can also be understood as a rational principle rooted in the experience of intimate communities. Intimate communities provide the environment of 'family' wherein needs are immediate to the conscience of the members of the community. In this environment the poor and oppressed find immediate support from those with whom they are intimate in communal life. To transfer this experience into a regulative principle results in a principle of solidarity with those most in need within a social framework.

It is this understanding of love as mutuality, which looks first to the poor and oppressed, that is the strength of the position of Liberation theology. Later in this chapter we will examine a more inclusive term to replace this designation of 'poor and oppressed'. In regard to love as mutuality, Liberation theology perceives a direct continuity between love expressed in intimate community and love expressed in social justice. This is a weakness of their position. Because they neglect the discontinuity between intimate community and social justice, their understanding of social justice is over optimistic. Their position lacks the dialectical rigour which reveals the limitations of social justice in relation to intimate community. Liberative realism understands that social justice lacks the dimension of intimacy which obtains in community life. This means that needs are not immediate to the consciousness of human beings. It means that human action and the results of such action are not present to the awareness of the human actor. On the level of social existence, the human is subject to social fragmentation, plurality, and complexity, which makes intimate community an impossible model for social justice. This ambiguity of social life is further complicated by organic forces for anarchy and chaos which are also realized in social existence. In this regard the conflict of life with life achieves greater intensity in the egoism and imperialism of groups within society. Group will-to-power is not mitigated by the conscience of intimate relationships in the complexity of social life.

It is because of these destructive qualities of social existence that Niebuhrian theology identifies regulative principles and artifacts of justice which specifically deal with individual and collective will-to-power and self-regard. From the perspective of social existence,

order is a primary principle. Order provides social continuity and stability. Niebuhrian theology understands that freedom, equality, and order, are held in dialectical tension in social life. The exclusive pursuit of any of these regulative principles will result in injustice. The principle of solidarity can be added to this dialectic.

This Niebuhrian understanding of social existence has specific consequences in regard to the creation of artifacts of justice. With group egoism and conflict as continual social realities, social justice will seek to hold in tension the need for freedom of individuals and groups to pursue their potentials, and the need for these competing interests to be affirmed equally. These needs will be held in tension with the need of social life to order these vitalities in a way that maintains social existence. This means that coercive power is also a dimension of social justice. Order will be realized by hierarchies of authority and the centralization of power. And in order for freedom and equality not to be jeopardized by this centralization of power and hierarchy of authority, artifacts of justice will need to be created which distribute power and ensure solidarity with those at the periphery of social life.

This understanding of social life as conflictual and complex is in fundamental discontinuity with intimate community. It is for this reason that Liberative realism can not agree with Liberation theology concerning its optimism in relation to social justice. In regard to mutuality realized in intimate communities, Liberative realism is in agreement with Liberation theology. Liberative realism would also agree that the experience of mutual love in intimate community permeates social existence and pushes social justice to achieve greater mutuality. This is the positive contribution of intimate community to social justice. But at the same time, social justice is to be understood as mainly negative in function. Unlike intimate community, it does not inspire greater mutuality. Rather, through principles and artifacts of justice it seeks to restrict the natural capacities for anarchy and chaos which exist in human life. Through the use of coercive power, it seeks to limit the egoism and imperialism of group behaviour. Through the centralization of power and the balance of power it seeks a relative social harmony which allows greater mutuality

to take place. In this manner intimate community and social justice are to be held in dialectical tension. Intimate community has the positive function of providing natural coherences and inspiration of mutuality in social life. In discontinuity with this function of intimate community, social justice functions in a negative fashion by restricting the expansive and oppressive potentials of individual and group behaviour. This is not to say that there are no positive dimensions in social justice. The structure of social justice is positive in that it provides distribution of economic and political power. But at the same time it is to be recognized that this distributive function of the structures of social justice do not operate due to natural coherences or the inspiration of mutuality. The positive distributive role of social justice functions by means of law and coercive power.

It is because of this difference in the understanding of social existence that Liberative realism is critical of the rationality of justice held by Liberation theology. Niebuhrian theology identifies four areas in the rationality of justice. These are: the vividness with which we appreciate the needs of others; the extent to which we become conscious of the real character of our own motives and impulses; the ability to harmonize conflicting impulses in our life and in society; and the capacity to choose adequate means for approved ends.[18] Liberative realism recognizes that the strength of Liberation theology is found in the first category wherein we appreciate the need of others. Liberation theology presses social justice to adopt principles and artifacts of justice which reflect this concern. It is in regard to the other principles of the rationality of justice that Liberation theology is found wanting. Liberation theology perceives a dialectic of conflict wherein egoism and will-to-power are exhibited in the oppression and impoverishment of people by the ruling groups of Latin American society. In this dialectic they neglect the Niebuhrian insight that all groups exhibit egoism and will-to-power and that conflict, plurality, relative inequality, and the potential for abuse of power, will always be characteristic of social existence. For this reason an effective rationality of justice will include the concern to limit and harmonize the conflict and egoism inherent in social life.

Within this rationality a healthy society is one which can achieve the greatest possible equilibrium of power and greatest possible numbers of centres of power, the greatest possible social check upon the administration of power, and the most effective use of forms of coercion wherein consent and coercion are compounded. Liberation theology neglects this dimension in their rationality of justice.

This brings us to consider the dialectic between social justice and the themes of religious realism. This dialectic is also understood in terms of continuity and discontinuity. Corresponding to the above examination, Liberation theology has tended to emphasize the continuity while Niebuhrian theology has emphasized the discontinuity. An integrative Liberative realism will seek to hold these two emphases together to obtain a fuller dialectic.

The themes of religious realism are divine love and the promise of the Kingdom of God. Within this understanding of religious realism there is a recognition that divine love and promise are both trans-historical and historical, transcendent and immanent. It is the opposition of these themes which reveal the continuous and discontinuous relationship with social justice. Liberative realism understands that divine love and the promise of the Kingdom are discontinuous with social justice in that they are trans-historical and transcendent themes. In this regard divine love is to be understood as gratuitous and universal. This is a love which is self-giving and self-sacrificial. This gratuitous and universal divine love stands in contrast with the love achieved in social relationships. The greatest love achieved in social life is mutuality. This is a love realized in reciprocity. In contrast to this mutuality is divine love which is self-giving without calculation of reciprocity. This divine love is a love which can not be the basis for social justice. Social justice requires the consideration of conflictive interests where mutuality is the highest achievement. In this regard, divine love is judgement and inspiration in regard to the achievements of social justice. Divine love continually reveals the human failure to live according to the law of life and inspires human endeavour to greater approximations of mutuality. The promise of the Kingdom of God takes on this same dialectical relationship in regard to social justice. It reveals

future promise of social existence which is not possible to human endeavour. It mediates judgement on present creations of justice and inspiration for future approximation.

Following the insights of Liberation theology, Liberative realism also understands these themes of religious realism to be continuous with social justice. It is in this regard that divine love and the promise of the Kingdom are understood to be preferential in regard to a specific historical referent. This means that divine love and promise are not impartial when applied to the realities of social life. This understanding of love and promise perceives that God is in solidarity with the marginated and oppressed in the social context. This preferential love and promise also carries with it judgement and inspiration. In this regard the poor and oppressed become the mediation of judgement on the failure of social justice. And in like manner, they also become the focus for commitment to achieve greater justice.

This dialectical relationship between social justice and the themes of religious realism has specific consequences in regard to the regulative principles and the artifacts of justice. The discontinuity of divine love and the promise of the Kingdom mediate judgement on all social endeavour and reveal the continual need for repentance and divine forgiveness. In terms of rational principles of justice, this experience of human limitation and divine grace is translated into the principle of tolerance. Tolerance is grounded in the humility of human social life under the judgment and mercy of God. In tension with this principle of tolerance is the principle of solidarity. Solidarity is the rational principle which originates from the preferential nature of divine love and promise which is continuous with social existence. While the principle of tolerance corresponds to our collective and general sense of limitation in social endeavour, the principle of solidarity indicates the specific referent in social life by which our limitation becomes explicit. In this manner both humility and commitment become characteristics of social justice.

In similar manner, the principles of freedom and equality are qualified by the themes of religious realism. In regard to freedom, the discontinuous nature of divine love and promise set the limits and

redefines the possibilities of human freedom. Niebuhrian theology understands that human freedom transcends the determined principles or laws of social justice. It is from the perspective of transcendent divine love and trans-historical promise that freedom is bound by the will of God. In this relationship freedom finds its greatest expression in self-giving love and faith in future promise. In like manner the continuous nature of preferential divine love and promise give this freedom a specific orientation in regard to self-giving and faith in the future. In this way freedom is expressed in a commitment toward the poor and oppressed and seeks social forms of justice which meet their needs.

The principle of equality is also qualified by the themes of religious realism. The transcendent and trans-historical themes of divine love and the promise of the Kingdom provide a religious justification for the principle of equality. These themes mediate divine judgment and mercy which reveal that human beings are equally subject to sin and equally recipients of divine forgiveness. This religious dimension affirms human equality in rejecting the possibility of a human claim to merit. But at the same time, this discontinuous nature of divine love and promise place the principle of equality under judgement. In this regard equality is a social principle of reciprocity approximating mutuality. For this reason the principle of equality represents a relational norm which is always less than the self-giving, gratuitous love of God. In similar manner the preferential nature of divine love and promise reveal the specific limitation and inadequacies of this principle. In this way the continuous nature of divine love and promise press social justice to seek greater possibilities of equality by means of commitment to those who are marginalized in the social attempt at equilibrium of power and interest.

The last two principles for our consideration are those of order and coercive power. These two principles are of specifically social origin and stand under judgement in regard to the themes of religious realism. These principles have to do with the maintenance and limitation of the conflictive nature of human social existence. Order in its most successful expression supports the social possibilities of

mutual love which are always less that divine self-giving. And coercive power is completely alien to love which is self-sacrificial. It is in regard to these principles that divine love and promise find their greatest discontinuity. Order and coercive power do not reflect any dimension of divine will or agency. Rather, they are necessitated by the limited and sinful nature of human individual and collective behaviour. The only manner in which divine love and promise are continuous with these principles of social justice is in the specificity of judgement provided by the preferential nature of divine love and promise. Divine preferential love and promise indicate a historical referent by which order is assessed and coercive power revealed as oppressive. In this manner judgement is not only general but has a specific historical referent.

This brings to a conclusion our examination of the possibility and necessity of social justice as understood by Liberative realism. The final part of this study will deal with the examination and justification of the integration of themes of Liberation theology into Niebuhrian theology. These specific themes are; the commitment to the poor and oppressed, and the utilization of realistic utopia.

Justice as the approximation to divine will

As indicated above, justice is a human endeavour pursued in the context of dialectical tension concerning divine love and the promise of the Kingdom of God. In this creative endeavour human beings seek to achieve the greatest degree of mutuality possible in their social life. For Niebuhrian theology this task is pursued under the transcendent norm of divine love and the trans-historical promise of the Kingdom of God. Liberation theology modifies the Niebuhrian position by identifying a historical dimension for these transcendent and trans-historical themes. In this manner Liberation theology identifies the concrete historical mediations of these Niebuhrian themes. In terms of divine love, Liberation theology perceives the poor and oppressed to be the preferential recipient of divine love. It is for this reason that the poor and oppressed become the mediation of divine judgement and call to repentance, conversion, and discipleship. In similar manner,

the present absence of the Kingdom of God and the future promise of the Kingdom of God is mediated through the presence of the poor and oppressed. This focal point found in the poor and oppressed, which indicates the need of the Kingdom, leads to the imaginative construction of realistic utopias. In this way the Kingdom of God finds relative and approximate realization in the creation of political structures and economic systems.

It will be the task of the rest of this section to identify how these historical mediations can be integrated into Niebuhrian theology. Our first concern will be with the significance and role of the poor and oppressed as a mediation of theological significance. This examination will be developed with reference to the christologies of both Niebuhrian and Liberation theology.

An initial observation is that the 'poor and oppressed' is primarily a sociological reference rather than a theological category. In this regard, the reference to the 'poor and oppressed' has to do with a specific historical context and is not applicable for a general theory. It is with this in mind that I suggest 'vulnerability' as a term which will be more general and inclusive of the 'poor and oppressed' as an identification of human vulnerability within a specific context. The term 'vulnerability' comes from the latin word *vulnus*, which means 'wound'. The English use of the word refers to openness to being wounded or exposed to damage.'[9] In the following we will explore the richness of this term as it serves as an anthropological as well as theological descriptive category.

A primary definition of 'vulnerability' will correspond to the Niebuhrian understanding of human organic existence. In this way, vulnerability refers to that dimension of human life wherein life is determined and restricted by nature-necessity. The theological significance of this organic vulnerability is that it is the occasion for sin. This vulnerability results in anxiety which the human being inevitably seeks to resolve by either the sin of pride or the sin of humility. By means of either self-regard and will-to-power or by self-degradation, the human being seeks to deny the vulnerability which is fundamental to human nature. The human seeks to lose this 'vulnerable self' by either a grandiose interpretation of the self or by

surrendering the self over to other vitalities and losing responsibility for dealing with one's vulnerability.

Both Niebuhrian and Liberation christology understand that Jesus Christ exemplifies this vulnerability and reveals the divine resolution of the sin which is the inevitable human response to vulnerability. Niebuhrian christology is in agreement with Boff and Sobrino concerning the human vulnerability of the 'historical Jesus'.[20] This Jesus is subject to nature-necessity as are all human beings. This is especially relevant in regard to Jesus' understanding of his mission. Sobrino perceives that Jesus was subject to a developmental process. His understanding of his mission evolved and grew in relation to the historical realities he had to deal with. For this reason Sobrino identifies the 'historical Jesus' as the history of Jesus' faith and trust in God. For Liberation and Niebuhrian theology this faith and trust is paradigmatic for how the self is to relate to the vulnerability of life. As Niebuhrian theology illustrates, seeking the self results in increased anxiety and an inescapable cycle of sin. Whereas the giving of the self over to God through faith and trust mitigates this anxiety and the cycle of sin. This does not mean that the self ceases to be vulnerable. It is rather the insight that the bondage relating to the vulnerability of the self has its foundation in the denial of vulnerability. This relationship with God in faith and trust means that the self is accepted in its fundamental vulnerability and that the resolution of that vulnerability is recognized as residing in the agency of God.

Niebuhrian theology emphasizes that this vulnerability, and the sin associated with it, are only resolved by God beyond current historical existence. The Cross of Christ reveals the perennial attempt by human beings to resolve vulnerability by will-to-power. In like manner, the resurrection indicates the divine power which will resolve human vulnerability and the sin associated with it by the transformation of human existence. It is in this regard that Liberative realism understands Jesus Christ to be the revelation of the 'impossible possibility'. It is impossible for human beings to resolve the vulnerable dimension of their organic existence. For this reason human beings are inevitably tempted to resolve this anxiety of the

'vulnerable self' either by loss of self or expansion of self. It is the affirmation of our christological study that Jesus Christ is subject to this vulnerability and temptation. And yet this same vulnerable Jesus Christ is also the revelation of human life lived in faith and trust. And in his death and resurrection is the revelation of divine mercy and grace which will resolve human vulnerability and sin. What is impossible for human agency is possible for divine agency.

A second meaning for the term 'vulnerability' corresponds to the concern of Liberation theology in regard to the 'poor and oppressed'. This form of vulnerability relates to human need to which society can respond. The first form of vulnerability had to do with human organic life which could only be resolved by the eschatological agency of God. This form of vulnerability has to do with the human condition wherein human agency can resolve or mitigate vulnerability. This vulnerability is imposed on human life from two sources. One source is biological. This vulnerability is exemplified by children, the elderly, the mentally ill, and the physically handicapped. This is a vulnerability imposed by nature and expresses itself in terms of need. And unlike the previous examination of vulnerability, it is a need to which human agency can respond in creative and constructive ways. The second source of vulnerability is socio-political and economic. This is the vulnerability which Liberation theology is familiar with. It is the vulnerability imposed on human life through political oppression and economic impoverishment. The need associated with this vulnerability has many expressions. It is poverty, lack of education, lack of medical care, poor housing, political powerlessness, low self-esteem, fear, and so on. What is characteristic concerning this vulnerability is that it is social in origin. It is not necessitated by organic life, but is the result of human agency in social existence. For this reason it is a vulnerability which can be resolved or mitigated by social agency.

This form of vulnerability is identifiable at all levels of social existence. In terms of the smallest social unit, the family, it is the recognition of the need expressed by children and the elderly. In terms of the social dimensions on up to the national level, it is the

identification of those who are marginated within the socio-political and economic system. This can include the mentally ill and physically handicapped as well as the 'poor and oppressed'. It can include ethnic minorities, religious minorities, women, or any other group of people whose values or needs do not correspond to the current social reality. In terms of international relations this vulnerability is expressed by nations that are marginated by international economic and political power. This vulnerability is also realized in natural disaster or ecological changes which threaten whole nations. In all these social levels of human existence the common factor is vulnerability as human need to which there can be human response. This is true from the level of the human family on up to the international community. At all levels there is human need and the ability and responsibility to meet that need.

This presence of the 'vulnerable' in social life takes on theological significance in regard to the prophetic ministry of Jesus Christ. Liberation christology understands that Jesus Christ denounces injustice on the basis of divine filial love. Under this universal love all human beings are understood to be brothers and sisters. It is for this reason that Jesus Christ reveals divine solidarity with those who suffer imposed vulnerability. Sobrino perceives this solidarity to be explicit in Jesus' decision to take the role of the marginated and oppressed upon himself.[21] In the cross is revealed the human who suffers imposed vulnerability. In like manner the resurrection reveals the divine solidarity with the human who is subjected to such vulnerability. Liberation theology perceives that this imposed vulnerability has continued theological significance. God continues to be in solidarity with those whose suffer imposed vulnerability. This is true of both biological and social sources of vulnerability. God's familial love is preferential toward those in need. It is in this regard that the presence of the vulnerable continue to mediate divine judgement and invitation. Their presence mediates the judgement of God by revealing the failure of our love and social justice. At the same time their presence is an invitation to repentance, conversion, and discipleship. It is an invitation to use our resources to meet human need and in so doing live out the fraternal love of God.

A third and final meaning for vulnerability which we will examine is in reference to divine love. Liberation theology identifies divine love as gratuitous and Niebuhrian theology identifies divine love as disinterested self-giving. Both of these positions indicate that vulnerability is a fundamental quality of divine love. Both these positions perceive divine love to be non-coercive and self-sacrifical. Sobrino and Niebuhr are in agreement that this quality of divine character is revealed in Jesus Christ as the suffering servant.[22] As noted above, Jesus not only suffers imposed vulnerability, but he accepts this vulnerability in faithfulness to his mission and to God. It is in the Cross and this accepted vulnerability that love is revealed as the law of life and the character of God. In Jesus Christ the nature of love is revealed. It is making one's self vulnerable to others, even to the point of experiencing rejection and death. Without this vulnerability, love is not possible. Love without vulnerability becomes another form of coercion or manipulation.

It is for this reason that Niebuhrian theology emphasizes divine love as judgement and mercy on human love. In Jesus Christ we have perceived that God has embraced 'accepted vulnerability' to a degree which transcends our ambiguous self-giving. In Christ, God has become vulnerable to the point of being rejected and crucified. In Christ we also perceive that it is not only the person of God who is subject to rejection, but also the promise of the Kingdom of God. As Liberation christology points out, the death of Jesus is also the rejection of his message. In this manner God is also vulnerable concerning the revelation of his will. Neither God's love or truth is a coercive power. This love and truth is a transforming power only as human beings embrace 'accepted vulnerability' through repentance, conversion, and discipleship. Niebuhrian theology corresponds to this insight with the understanding that faith in God is a relationship to a self-giving love or vulnerability which is finally revealed as a transcendent grace which is sovereign over human life and history.

This understanding of divine 'accepted vulnerability' has continuing historical significance. In this regard, love as the law of life continues to be vulnerable to rejection and distortion. Niebuhrian theology is sensitive to this perennial rejection and

distortion of the transcendent dimension of life by individual and group egoism and self-regard. Liberation theology also perceives 'accepted vulnerability' to have continued historical significance. Gutiérrez and Boff understand that discipleship involves accepted vulnerability in the context of oppression.[23] Above we identified the theological significance of those who suffer imposed vulnerability. This imposed vulnerability has significance in a passive and general manner. The theological significance of those who suffer imposed vulnerability has nothing to do with their agency or commitment. Accepted vulnerability differs from imposed vulnerability in that it is more specific and active, and relates directly to human agency. This accepted vulnerability refers to those who follow the path of Christ and who suffer his fate. In this way the Cross and the role of suffering servant continues to have historical expression. Like the theological significance of imposed vulnerability, this accepted vulnerability has the significance of judgement and invitation. In the 'cross' of those who suffer death in accepted vulnerability, we are challenged concerning our own discipleship and our own historical commitment.

In the above we have considered the term 'vulnerability' as a general concept which is inclusive of the historical commitment of Liberation theology. In this manner we have demonstrated that this understanding of vulnerability is one which gives Niebuhrian theology a liberative dimension through a historical referent. It is now appropriate to turn to the second historical mediation suggested by Liberation theology. This is the use of realistic utopia as a relative and approximate effort to realize the values and commitment of the Kingdom of God in social life.

The Kingdom of God refers to divine love in terms of future eschatological fulfilment. For this reason, what has been said about love as vulnerability also applies to the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is an 'impossible possibility' in regard to human ambitions in history. It is the promise of divine fulfilment which is not possible within human agency. And corresponding to divine love as accepted vulnerability, this Kingdom of God is not a coercive power in history. Like the vulnerability of love, the Kingdom of God is a transforming

power which becomes relatively present through faith expressed in repentance, conversion and discipleship. In like manner, the presence of those who suffer 'imposed vulnerability' are also significant in regard to the Kingdom. By their presence they indicate the absence of the Kingdom and prevent any historical achievement from claiming divine justification. In this way they also indicate future possibility for greater achievement of justice.

The weakness of Niebuhrian theology, in regard to the Kingdom of God, concerns concrete historical reference. Niebuhrian theology perceives that the Kingdom of God impinges on the moral conscience of the human agent in history. Liberation theology intensifies this presence of the Kingdom of God by reference to the 'poor and oppressed'. The presence of the 'vulnerable' and their theological significance makes the dialectical nature of the Kingdom more explicit. But this reference to those who are vulnerable in society does not provide guidance for the creation of just social systems. It does provide the historical referent from which social systems can be assessed and judged. But it does not guide the creative process of imaginative work concerning future possibility. Liberation theology understands that imaginative models of social life need to be created to guide social life as it exists under the Kingdom of God as future promise. They identify this process as the creation of realistic utopia. This realistic utopia is an imaginative model of human origin which seeks to realize relative approximations of the divine promise in the realities of social existence. This use of the term 'utopia' is problematic. It has been used to refer to an imagined perfect place or state of things. For this reason it has carried pejorative meaning when used in political discussion. Liberation theologians wish to avoid this meaning of the term 'utopia'. Liberation theology is more concerned with the creative use of imagination in the task of exploring future political and economic possibility. In this regard 'realistic utopia' is to be understood as referring to an imaginative vision of an optimal society.

From the perspective of Niebuhrian theology this use of utopia in Liberation theology is subject to dangerous abuse. Because Liberation theology assumes an optimistic anthropology, its utopic constructions

are subject to the increased danger of becoming emotive symbols which will justify collective egoism and will-to-power. From the perspective of Liberation theology, Niebuhrian theology lacks any mediation between the 'impossible possibility' of the Kingdom of God and the reality of human social existence. A Liberative realism which is integrative concerning the insights of Liberation theology will seek to adapt the mediation of realistic utopia within the horizons of its dialectical theology and pragmatic ethics. This would effectively mitigate the optimism of Liberation theology and provide Niebuhrian theology with a guide for imaginative work concerning the construction of future social possibilities.

This imaginative work of creating realistic utopia within the context of Liberative realism would exhibit the same characteristics as that of theology and ethics. Utopic thought would be understood to be integrative, contextual, and a process. It would be integrative in that it would follow the pragmatic method of seeking coherence with the larger environment of ideas and experience. This dimension of realistic utopian thought is exemplified by Liberation theology in its recognition of the importance of the social sciences. The move from present social realities to the realm of future possibility needs the analysis and insight which social science can provide. Another consequence of this integrative process would be that utopic thought be dialogical. Utopic thought within the context of Liberative realism would recognize the plurality and conflict of groups within society. This would entail dialogue between different interests in society and an attempt to achieve consensus concerning future goals. This dialogical dimension of utopic thought is especially important on the level of international relationships. Liberative realism recognizes that national utopic work cannot function in isolation. On the international level, different national utopic visions come into conflict and can result in political and economic intervention and domination. Liberation theology is aware of this reality in terms of 'dependence theory'. Therefore, national utopic thought needs to be in dialogue, debate, and negotiation, with other nations and their utopic options. This dialogue is necessitated by the political and economic power of other nations which can restrict or support the utopic hopes

of a specific nation. In this manner utopic options are subject to pragmatic assessment. A national utopic option is not realistic if it disregards the utopic goals of its larger economic and political environment. In this way utopic thought is a continual exploration of political and economic possibility in regard to plurality within its national borders as well as in reference to powers outside its borders.

The second concern of utopian thought is that it be contextual. It is contextual in that it seeks to be relevant to the culture, history, and needs of a specific society. In this regard utopian thought is relative to its cultural and geographical context. There is no one utopian hope which applies to all societies. Different societies reflect different determinisms of history, culture, nature, and geographical specificity. Utopian thought seeks to integrate and relate to these various determinisms. It is in regard to this contextual and relative social environment that utopian thought must demonstrate its pragmatic utility. In this regard, utopian thought must be successful in guiding human agency in the achievement of greater justice in social life. It is at this point that the 'vulnerable' become significant for utopian thought. The presence of the 'vulnerable' of society indicate the need for utopian thought and are the point for pragmatic assessment. They are the continual reference for judgement on all creative activity which is guided by utopian expectation.

The third description of realistic utopian thought is that it is to be understood as process. This means that utopian thought is future orientated reflection which continually calls into question 'what is' for the sake of 'what can be'. This process is not understood as cumulative in nature. The pursuit of future possibility of greater justice is always an ambiguous process. It includes the possibility of greater injustice by means of new forms of individual and collective self-regard and will-to-power. Therefore, it is a process of continual social criticism and experimentation. There is never a point at which a utopia is achieved. When the goals of utopic thought are realized, new distortions of social life are revealed and new possibilities of improved justice are indicated. In this manner, justice is to be

understood as a continual journey which is completed only in the realization of the eschatological Kingdom of God.

Summary: The contribution of Liberation theology to Niebuhrian theology

Rubem Alves once stated that post-Niebuhrian Christian Realism was the ideology of the establishment.[24] This assessment reveals an irony concerning Niebuhrian theology. Niebuhr was concerned with the maintenance of a justice that balanced group interest and distributed power. And yet, the comment by Alves would indicate that his theology was utilized by a specific group to justify its hegemony. This irony concerning the intention and the use of Niebuhrian theology reveals its weakness. When Liberation theology asks Niebuhrian theology: 'who does theology serve?, the answer is ambiguous. Niebuhrian theology would hope to answer that it roughly serves everyone. But this answer does not seem to be justified by its use. In practice it would seem that Niebuhrian theology has been in service of particular groups and their political interest.

Our dialogue with Liberation theology has revealed this area of weakness in Niebuhrian theology. This weakness is found in the religious dialectic of Niebuhrian theology. This weakness is not in Niebuhr's anthropological realism. Here we find a rigorous dialectic inclusive of organic, social, and transcendent dimensions of human life. Where we find an inadequate dialectic is in reference to the theological themes of love and the promise of the Kingdom of God. Here we find that Liberation theology confronts Niebuhrian theology concerning its lack of religious realism. Niebuhrian religious analysis is lacking in historical breadth concerning religious experience. He emphasizes the human experience of transcendence in regard to the divine. The strength of this analysis is the recognition of trans-historical and transcendent themes. The weakness of this analysis is lack of historical and immanent reference concerning these themes. Niebuhr's religious themes are historical in that they impinge on the moral consciousness of human beings as they act as historical agents. But these religious themes are not to be identified directly

with any vitality of history. Niebuhr maintains a continual suspicion concerning the ambiguity and distortion of historical reality.

It is this lack of dialectic rigour in regard to history that allows Niebuhrian theology to be manipulated to serve various interests in society. Liberation theology rectifies this weakness by identifying a specific commitment within history. This commitment is justified by divine preferential love and solidarity. Following Liberation theology, the 'vulnerable' are the subject of this commitment. It is this commitment that is the occasion for religious experience in history beyond the moral consciousness of Niebuhrian theology. The 'vulnerable' give the moral consciousness a specific, historical referent. It is in the commitment to the 'other' identified in the 'vulnerable' which serves as the context in which one experiences the vulnerability of the divine 'Other'. This historical dimension of religious experience gives new meaning to repentance, conversion, and discipleship. These categories have concrete meaning in regard to specific folk in social existence. In this manner, Liberation theology provides a spirituality engaged in historical experience.

It is this concern for the historical dimension which presses Niebuhrian theology to modify its dialectic. We have seen in earlier chapters that Liberation theology has contributed to Niebuhrian theology in regard to theological method, ethics, and christology. The result of this dialogue is the recognition that 'vulnerability' is intimately tied to an understanding of justice. And we have seen that 'vulnerability' is more that just a general description of human organic existence. It is a description of human need to which God becomes vulnerable. It is at this point that Niebuhrian theology can adopt a religious realism. Divine love is a preferential love which guides justice to embrace a similar commitment.

Liberation theology presses Niebuhrian theology to understand that justice is not just the maintenance of balance of power in an environment of social conflict. It is also a concern of christian spirituality. It is a continual repentance, conversion, and discipleship, exercised in reference to the 'vulnerable' of social life. This does not deny the insights of Niebuhrian theology concerning the ambiguity, complexity, or cross-purposes found in social

existence. It is a commitment and a faith expressed in spite of these limitations. It is here that Niebuhrian spirituality expresses a creative dialectic with Liberation spirituality. Niebuhrian emphasis on justification by grace supports this historical commitment with the affirmation that divine agency will complete and rectify our inadequate attempts to live out our spirituality in regard to the limitations of social justice.

NOTES

1. Rubem A. Alves, "Christian Realism: Ideology of the Establishment", in *Christianity and Crisis*, Vol. 33, No. 15, September 17, 1973, pages 173 - 176.
2. See above pages 79 and 80.
3. See above pages 112 - 123; 185 - 189.
4. See above page 112.
5. See above pages 102 - 104.
6. See above pages 102ff.
7. Ibid.
8. See above pages 7 and 8.
9. See above pages 85 and 86.
10. See above pages 135 and 136.
11. See above pages 129 - 133.
12. See above page 18.
13. See above pages 144ff.
14. See above pages 151 - 159.
15. See above pages 117 and 118.
16. See above pages 115 - 117; 257 and 258.
17. See above pages 36 and 37.
18. See above pages 12 and 13.
19. F.G. Fowler and H.W. Fowler ed., *The Oxford Handy Dictionary*, London, Chancellor Press, 1986, page 1020.
20. See above pages 190 and 191.
21. See above pages 209 and 211.
22. See above pages 200 - 203.
23. See above pages 155 and 229.
24. Alves, op. cit.

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